THE

NEW CENTURION

A Tale of Automatic War

BY

JAMES EASTWICK

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TO THE READER

MANY years ago the writer of these pages first conceived the idea that, as the heavy guns of a modern ironclad were, and must ever be, her decisive weapons, the chief thing to be attended to was to increase their rate and precision of fire, and that the power requisite for this purpose could readily and economically be obtained from the guns' recoil. Further, it occurred to him that this might enable the crew to be withdrawn from the vicinity of the guns, and the weight of the necessary armour protection to be greatly reduced.

Ideas of this sort were taken up at intervals as the amusement of idle hours, but it was long before they assumed any definite shape, and longer still before any notion was entertained of bringing them to any serious or practical conclusion.

Meanwhile a great development took place in quick-firing guns of smaller calibre, a development which has not as yet been attended by any corresponding development in the means of protecting the men working them. The urgent need of some such protection was forcibly pointed out by Mr. Arnold Foster in his well-known work, 'In a Conning Tower', b

he gave no indication of the direction in which this protection was to be sought. In reading that work it struck the writer that the requisite protection could not be obtained from armour without exceeding the available limit of weight, that the only means of affording it was to enable the sailor to find shelter in water as the soldier does in earth, and that this was an additional reason for the use of automatic artillery.

But when Mr. Arnold Foster wrote, the need of protection, though urgent, was as nothing to what it has since become. In 1891 'high explosives' were known indeed, but their poisonous effect was not appreciated; subsequently, it was recognised that the fumes of modern shell were at least as dangerous as the splinters, and indeed more so, for shields and casemates might afford some protection against the splinters, but would be useless against the fumes. Here, again, it seemed that the notion of the shelter-trench was the only adequate solution of the problem.

Still the writer hesitated to publish his views without first knowing that an automatic heavy gun was not only desirable but possible, and he probably would have kept his ideas to himself if they had not almost by accident been communicated to a professional friend, under whose guidance they quickly assumed a very different and far more practical shape.

As soon as the design was fairly complete, there *was no longer any* reason for silence, and accordingly an

article was published in the 'Contemporary Review' of last September, which evoked the not unnatural query what fighting with automatic weapons would be like. In order to answer this question, the first thing to be done was to put some limit on the inquiry; otherwise any attempt to answer it would be sure to end in describing one of those mythical contests between an unheard-of ironclad and an equally unheard-of enemy of which we have too many already, and from which nothing ever has been learnt or ever will be. And the best mode of confining the inquiry within some definite limits seemed to be to take some one modern ship of acknowledged excellence, to re-arm her with the proposed weapons, and then to imagine her engaged with other ships equally modern, but of various types. This method the writer has attempted to pursue in the following pages, which he puts forward in the hope that they may meet with the indulgence of the reader.

It only remains to apologise to all interested in the various ships mentioned for the liberties taken with their names, and above all to the captain and officers of H.M.S. *Centurion* and to the Chief Constructor by whom she was designed.

THE NEW CENTURION

LETTER I

Centurion, Portsmouth.

I got down safely, but feeling very weak and ill. My old servant met me at the station; he was better than I, but still it was all that we could do between us to get safely on board. I reported myself duly to our new Captain, whom I have always heard of as a smart and able man, rather a Tartar, as strict with others as he is with himself; but to me he was all kindness. He saw that I was ill, and, first of all, pressed me to go on the sick list, and then, when I would not do this, he said: 'Well, you may persist as much as you like; but, at least, you cannot complain of special and easy duty. I have to command what is really a new craft, rebuilt in consequence of your fight with the *Rurik*. I have got before me the ideas of the designers and the Admiralty, but I have not got before me any graphic statement of what actually happened, though that is clearly the basis of the whole thing. You saw it, and, if fame speaks truly, you contributed not a little to the result; before you go on any other duty, you shall put before me a full account of what you saw until you lost your senses. Mind—of what you saw, not of what the ship did; I know enough of that. And mind also—*you* do not begin to-day.'

So, having nothing else to do, I am writing the

lines. Verily the skipper may well say that she is a new craft; she was terribly wrecked, as we all know, but in the dockyard she seems to have been rebuilt from stem to stern. I have not yet made out what has been done, but I shall soon know; if a comfortable ward-room is anything, we certainly have got that.

LETTER II

Centurion, Spithead.

You see that we are out of harbour, and whether it is that, or the rest, or whatever it may be, I am wonderfully stronger. I wrote my account for the Captain, making it exactly what he said—an account of what I saw. I related how we came into action—how we began with the heavy guns at long range; how little effect was produced on either side; how by degrees we closed and the secondary armament began to tell; how little direct injury was done by the enemy's 6-in. guns, and how terrible was the indirect injury. Then I gave him an impression, as accurate as I could, of the effect of that indirect injury on our crew: how our men fell in scores, mostly untouched by iron but simply poisoned—lying in heaps, still and quiet, as if in sleep, the pallid faces and blue lips only showing the work of the deadly melinite fumes. Then I told how C—— and I worked the two barbettes. How C—— fared I did not know, but I did know and told the fearful work of laying the guns in those shields (open though they were), under the maddening thirst and swimming vision and reeling senses produced by that horrible poisoning. The end I did not know; somehow it had been all right, for while I wrote C—— was sitting at my elbow, and the refitted *Rurik was lying just between* us and Whale Island.

By the time I had finished we were under way for

our anchorage outside the bar, and being not yet on duty, and having nothing else to do, I inspected the ship thoroughly. And in good truth she is a 'new *Centurion*,' for there is little or nothing of the old ship about her. Her old boilers have been taken out and replaced by new water-tube boilers, and her engines improved to match; she is said to log her nineteen knots easily now. Her old 12" and 4" belts have been taken off, and in their place she has a belt of a uniform thickness of 8" Harveyed steel. Inside this there has been built a sort of turtle-back over her engines, boilers, and magazines; but it is not a turtle-back exactly, for two reasons. First, it does not come quite to the sides, the space left affording room for excellent shoots between the upper and lower bunkers, so that we shall have no trouble about getting the coal to the furnaces. These shoots are fitted with watertight doors that are said to close tight and not to jam with the coal; it seems impossible, but the chief engineer tells me that he has tried them repeatedly, and made quite sure of it. The second curious thing is that over the passage between the longitudinal bulkheads there is no armour at all; the turtle-back, instead of being continuous, is, as it were, split open, and turned up into two solid combings along the line of the bulkheads, which are carried up above these combings as far as the main-deck. The passage itself, instead of having two decks, has three, the lowest of all being a magazine deck, that immediately above it being fitted with electric gear which I could not make out, while above this again is a mere grating clear of fittings, but communicating with the upper works by broad and easy stairs. Forward and aft are, of course, the barbettes. I could see at once that they had been rebuilt and were smaller at the base *than they* had been, but what further change had been *made I had* not time to make out. One thing is obvio

to anybody who steps on our spar-deck, and this is that our old 29-ton guns are gone, and that in their place we have two pairs of much longer and heavier pieces, presumably the new 46-ton guns. And another thing is equally obvious, which is, that they have made a clean sweep of every other gun on board—guns, case-mates, shields, and all—and in their place have given us an array of Maxims, 3-prs. and 12-prs., without any sort of protection whatsoever. Even our old military masts have gone, and in their place we have two light masts, not very unlike those of a Castle liner, with three Maxims in each top, but no shields.[1] I cannot make out the policy of this at all; probably I soon shall get some light on it, for as I was studying the Maxims on the spar deck the Captain came on deck, and, seeing me, thanked me for my report, saying that it was exactly what he wanted. He asked me to go through it with him carefully to-night, so I may learn what all this means.

LETTER III

Centurion, Plymouth.

We had a splendid run down Channel in lovely weather, our new machinery working beautifully. We have been constantly at quarters, and are shaking down very comfortably together.

But to go on where I left off. I spent a very pleasant and instructive evening with the Captain and the Commander over my report. They both of them made merry over my realistic style, which they said was worthy of Zola himself, but the Captain added that it afforded precisely that key to the constructor's policy which he wanted. Himself he had never seen the effect of a sustained and superior fire of modern *quick-firing weapons*—at least in the way of enduring

[1] See Appendix.

it. His own experience had been gained in cruisers against more lightly armed enemies, and he said that my account gave him exactly that idea of the utter impossibility of standing up to a secondary armament against a superior fire which he had previously failed to realise. He had appreciated the direct, but not the indirect, effects of such a fire, and in particular the terrible poison of the melinite fumes between decks had never really come home to him. At this I ventured to say that it would be more difficult to stand up to our new Maxims, and in addition to this they would not be so efficient as the old 4·7″ guns. The Commander asked if I had gone into their electric gear. I said that I had not; I had only had time when I had finished my report to note the main features of the alterations made in the ship, but not to study the mass of new details. Then said the Captain: 'You noted those decks or flats along the passage between the central bulkheads? Well, in close action the bulk of the ship's company is to be there, and from there the Maxims are to be fought by electric gear. Until I read your report this evening it has been a hateful notion: I have been trained a seaman, and my fighting—such as I have seen—has been in daylight and open air. I hated the idea of a crew skulking beneath the water-line. But now I begin to see that to keep one's decks from being a perfect shambles one must keep one's men in shelter. I am told that on such tonnage as ours efficient armour shelter on the main and spar decks is out of the question, and that shelter can only be had at the water-line, and on this basis your report makes me think that the constructors are right.'

'But, sir, even so, our Maxims are surely too light for the work?'

'I don't know—that depends on you and C—— '

'*Why so, sir?*'

'Because I mean each of you to take one of the barbettes. Those new 46-ton guns are splendid weapons, and they have a novel automatic mounting which is supposed to supply the want of heavy quick-firing guns. They say that these guns can fire four or five shots each a minute. With them you ought to do far better than you did with the *Rurik*.'

It was a new idea to me, and all that I could do was to say so plainly, adding that ever since that fight I had been unable to leave my room, and that this long illness had prevented me from keeping up with professional matters as I could have wished.

'Well, you shall have opportunity enough of learning them now, but I shall take good care that you do not do too much. I look upon you as one of our chief weapons, and for the present I shall keep an eye on you myself.'

Then the conversation turned to other things, and presently I took my leave.

The next day I got to work. For four hours or so I explored that barbette—the forward one—by myself, at first without, then with, the official description and directions. It was so new that it took me fully that time to get any idea of it into my head. To begin with, the loading—if you can call that loading which is not touched by any hand—is not done in the barbette, but above it in the shield, which is lengthened a little on purpose. Next, there is no sighting the guns. What is sighted is a dummy, with which the guns align themselves when in firing gear. And even this is not sighted in the ordinary way, but by mirror sights from the platform decks. At quarters not a man need be above the water-line. If anything goes wrong, the most that happens is that everything comes to a standstill until it is set right, and then the mechanism goes *on again from the point* where it left off.[2] And I rightly

[2] See Appendix.

spoke of platform decks in the plural, for there are two, each gun having one to itself for its ammunition arrangements, and these decks correspond, speaking roughly, with the two upper decks within the central bulkheads. As I stood on these platform decks, or rather on the turn-tables on the same level on which the ammunition arrangements work, I could look down the long passage and see C —— already at work with his division in the after-barbette, and I began to see something of the designer's meaning. The long intervening space was comparatively in the open air and even in daylight, and here was to be centred in action the whole life of the ship. I could fancy that I saw the crews of the Maxims at work at their magazines and their gear, and the long line of small-arm men standing patiently on the gratings above them, my own people hard at work around me feeding the ammunition lifts, and my junior officers working the sights. Shot and shell might have their own way with the upper works; we should be in a regular redoubt, and yet as much together and in hand as the crew of a 36-gun frigate in the olden time.

In the afternoon I mustered my men for the first time, and we got to work to learn our new weapons. My division consists of two sub-lieutenants, four midshipmen, and thirty men. I explained exactly what each had to do, and put them to their various stations. The senior sub-lieutenant took the training, the other the elevating, gear, while each middy had an ammunition gang under him. Then we saw that the current was on—all the working not done by the recoil is electric—and that the hydraulic mechanism was filled with fluid—the automatic gear depends on springs and hydraulic fittings—then we set to work with the *running-in* presses. After each trial I made the subs *and middies* say what had happened and what they

to do, and in about four trials we all began to understand the working of the things. In a few more we should have done something, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and a voice said: 'That will do; you are spent already. I will take it now.' It was the Captain himself, and he would not let me stay any longer. So I went away to the ward-room, and then found out that I had been ill and was nearly knocked up. I heard afterwards that the skipper kept the division nearly two hours, not drilling them, but making each in turn—officers and men alike—explain in his own words how the guns acted and what each particular man, and especially the speaker, had to do and why. Certainly, next morning I found that they had been in smart hands and had profited accordingly.

The next morning the ship was under way, and we had heavy gun practice off St. Helens. The crews of the Maxims were hard at work being trained in their electric gear, and so it was almost like general quarters, though there were no small-arm men on the gratings, no quartermasters standing by the lower wheel ready to steer if the conning-house should be wrecked, and no Commander overlooking the whole. I mustered my men, catechised them on their different duties, sent them to their posts, stationed the subs. and the middies, and then ordered the magazines open. Then I saw that the current was on, examined the gauges of the hydraulic gear, and stood waiting for orders. I ought to explain that though the sighting is done from below by mirror-sights, yet there are two places arranged for me as officer of the barbette, one on the upper platform deck, which is fitted with a sort of mirror arrangement by which I can see nearly as well as if I were on deck, the other in the shield in rear of the guns, communicating with the platform decks by telegraphs and telephones. Each place has a set of

sights and duplicate training, elevating, and firing levers, so that whether on the platform deck or in the shield I can see exactly what is going on, can check the work of my subs., or can work the guns with my own hands. On the present occasion I determined to see with my own eyes the actual working of the two guns when fired for the first time, so I took my stand in the shield.

It was a glorious noonday with a light breeze blowing, the ship just gently rising on such swell as there was. Looking out from the manhole in the top of the shield I could see the Commander in charge on the upper bridge, and on the lower the Captain intently watching my proceedings. With him was C——, and below on the spar deck were the whole company of the after-barbette looking on. The target was already laid out, and the order was passed to fire three shots singly from the right gun. I passed the word down: two men came up and worked the handjack, the gun reared up her breech to the loading level, and the breech-block ran out to a point just beside my knees; then the men went down and the gun stood waiting ready, but empty. Then I passed the word for the charge: the lift worked, there was a sharp rattle, and the gun was loaded and locked and ready for firing. I ordered the second charge to be sent up at once, and as soon as it was in the loading-trough I glanced at the duplicate sights before me, saw that the subs. were fairly on the mark, and fired—I am bound to say, not without feeling rather nervous. There was a flash and a roar in front of the shield, and closer to me a rattle and clank. Before the light fumes of the smokeless powder had vanished, the gun was loaded and in firing gear once more. The aim was fairly good—not more; so, ordering the third charge to be sent up, I watched the *sighting more* carefully. The subs. were getting nor

used to their work: the sighting was steadier and better; again I fired, and the shell burst just over the target. I did not wait long; almost as soon as I saw the splash and foam I made the circuit for the third shot. The gun was ready and fired instantly, and again the splinters struck all round the target, the gun remaining at the loading level with the breech-block run out in readiness for more charges. The Captain gave a nod of approval, and then ordered C—— to put his men to his guns, while all mine were to come on deck and look on. We saw three shots fired with much the same results; then the word was given to fire four shots from the other gun at full speed. I stood with my watch in my hand, and made sure that from the flash of the first shot to that of the last was not more than twenty-seven seconds. The splinters flew all round the target as before, but we could not see that it was actually struck. The Captain seemed very satisfied, and ordered me to send my people back to their stations and fire four rounds in like manner from our left gun, which had not yet been fired. I asked if he would wish me to remain in the shield, but he said no, he would rather that this time I should try the lower station. So my people went to their quarters, the four charges were placed in the revolving feed gear at the foot of the lift, my subs. took their places, and I took mine. At first the mirror arrangement was very puzzling—not that I could not see, but that the dancing of the pictures with the motion of the ship made me so dizzy. By degrees this wore off, and I could test fairly the sighting of my subs. Then I made the firing circuit, and the four shots blazed off—time, twenty-five seconds. This was good. One shot went wide altogether, but against that, one struck the *target and smashed it.* The gun was left waiting with *her breech open, and* we examined her carefully. She

was hot, but not excessively so, and there was no trace of erosion or other injury. We washed out both guns and eased springs, and then piped down.

The next day we had our first general quarters, and a striking sight it was—more so than I had anticipated. Nearly the whole ship's company, except the torpedo gangs and the engineers and stokers, were mustered in those long passages, and the general effect of united and orderly duty was most striking—especially to those who had been used to the old idea of splitting up a ship's company into isolated parties, each in its own little fort. Nor was this all: the Commander at his post by the lower wheel could see the least hitch anywhere, and could be on the spot in a moment. Hitches of course there were, and were bound to be at first, and we soon found out that our Commander was as smart as need be. My people had learnt their work pretty well, and the ordinary drill was gone through quickly and easily, the running-in being done by the jacks without any firing.

But in the afternoon we had a new task given us. Somehow I had got an idea that both the Captain and Commander put rather more confidence in me than in C——, and I suppose that I ought to be flattered that they chose my guns for the trial rather than his, but indeed I would rather go through a stiff fight any day. We were ordered to our quarters; the magazines were opened; seven charges were served out and put in the feed gear—four for one gun, three for the other—and then we waited. Presently came down to us Captain, Commander, and first lieutenant. They looked over everything for a minute or two, and then the Commander began unscrewing some of the electric contacts. I stared, knowing that he was putting the gear of the electric brake out of action, and I must say that when the order to fire that gun was given I did expect *a smash. But* no. There was the flash and roar c

the gun, and rather more shock from the recoil than usual—that was all. We all went on deck to look at her, and found her at rest near the firing point on the slide with her breech closed. The brake gear was put in order again, the handjack started, and she worked just as if nothing had happened. A second shot was tried in the same way from the other gun and with the same result, and then I began to breathe freely. It is true that I knew that any derangement of the brake ought to put on its whole power instead of taking it off, but until it was tried I was not at all so sure that it would do so, or what the result would be if it did: after this trial there was no doubt. All the other five shots were fired, and at each shot some new part of the gear was put out of action, but what it was we were not told beforehand. At every shot the gun came quietly to a standstill at the point in its action corresponding to the disabled apparatus; and every time that this happened some one fresh—officer or man indifferently—was called on to set matters right and start the action again. By the time we had done that drill I think that every one of us had come to the conclusion that our guns were as safe as they were easy to work.

Since then every day's experience has confirmed us in our good opinion of the ship and her gear, and, above all, of the benefits of union in duty. Without the means of fighting from the 'shelter trench' this would be impossible, but with those means it far outweighs the objections one would otherwise feel to withdrawing the men from the upper works in battle.

Blue water and work have made me all right again. We have an excellent set of men in the ward-room, good comrades in every way. If our commission is as successful as it promises to be happy, we shall do well.

I just open this to say that we have our orders, and *shall be under way in* an hour's time.

LETTER IV

Centurion, off Vigo.

The prizes are just leaving us, so I put together and finish up in a hurry the notes I wrote for you on our voyage out. If they make rather a disjointed letter, I hope you will forgive it.

We have had a splendid two days' run from Plymouth. We just spoke the blockaders off Brest, otherwise we did not see a single craft. The whole sea seemed a desert, such a desert as war only can make. Both days we have had our general quarters, and both nights we have had new quarters, of a kind, which is our Captain's own invention. At eight bells every evening we of the ward-room all meet in his cabin, and there for an hour and a half every possible form of fighting the ship, and every duty which she is likely to have to discharge, is discussed. One thing was quickly decided, which was that, for repelling torpedo attacks, especially at night, it would be better to fight the Maxims by hand than by the electric gear. They can be fought either way, and our men are already trained in both methods, so there is no difficulty about this. Another point on which both C—— and I agreed, and carried the rest—even including the Captain—with us was that at night it was difficult, if not impossible, to sight the heavy guns from below, and that it would be better in fighting at night that we two should each do our own sighting from our places in the rear of the shields, where we could work just as well as the subs. could, and where we could manage luminous sights much better. Another thing that we all agreed upon was to get close to an enemy and give it him hot as soon as we *could*. *This* depends on a mere calculation of chances

assuming that we can fire our heavy guns six times as fast as our enemy can his, which is probably the case, it follows that at effective ranges we have six times more chances of hitting than he has, and consequently have as much greater chances of inflicting decisive injury, whereas at long ranges this superiority would be much less decisive.

These are our reflections; perhaps we shall soon test them.

Sooner than we thought. I wrote the last lines looking forward to a quiet middle watch and the usual daily routine afterwards, and little thinking that in less than twelve hours we should have seen our first fight, if only a little one.

When I went on deck to take charge of the watch it was blowing great guns from the south-west, with occasional heavy squalls of rain. The skipper came on deck once or twice, but he did not seem anxious, and gave me no particular caution. I paced the upper bridge forward, seeing that my look-outs were on the alert, and occasionally casting an eye on the figures of the watch on deck, sheltering under the lee of the bulwarks. By-and-by a glorious moon shone out between two squalls. There was nothing visible but the seas, showing white in the moonlight, and the driving scud flying swiftly across the sky. Presently another squall broke with a driving rain, which hissed on bridge and deck; it soon passed, and the moon shone out again as brightly as before. It was now past seven bells, and I began to think of the dog watch and turning in when there was a hail from the foretop.

'Sail on the weather bow!'

I jumped up the rigging in less time than it takes to *write it.*

'Where away?'

'Three points on the weather bow, sir, just under the moon.'

I looked hard, but could only see the heaving swell and a black patch of squall just where the look-out pointed.

'What was she like?'

'Two small craft, sir, with a lot of top-hamper.'

'Two of them?'

'Yes, sir, they seemed to be making baddish weather of it.'

Two of them together did not look well; still, I did not want to rouse the ship for nothing.

'Two, did you say? Are you sure?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What was the top-hamper like?'

'Couldn't rightly say, sir; seemed heavy for small craft.'

Just then there came a rift in the rising squall, and for a second I saw them both. The next instant I was sliding down a backstay; in two minutes more the Captain was roused, the men scurrying to their quarters, and the induced draught on. The squall quickly passed over us, leaving a white moonlit sea; by this time the whole ship's company were at 'torpedo quarters;' the ship was quickening rapidly to full speed; my people, having nothing to do with the heavy guns, were standing by with small arms. I was standing by the Captain on the upper bridge; but where was the enemy? We searched the moonlit sea, but not a trace was to be seen; the Captain was just turning round to me with, I am sure, something forcible on his lips, when all of a sudden they rose into view on the swell, no longer in the distant offing, but less than two knots off, coming dead on, one on either bow, villainous *torpilleurs de haute mer* as ever were seen. Evidently they had run *down to attack* us under cover of the squall, and it

fortunate for us that it had outstripped them, for otherwise we might have been attacked in the rain and darkness without much chance of defending ourselves. As it was both we and the enemy were now at full speed; we ported sharply to attack the one which had been seen on our starboard bow; then as she rose again on the swell we started our whole broadside of Maxims. For one or two seconds the aim seemed wild, but then the missiles found their mark. A striking scene it was when one thinks of it coolly, though there was but little cool reflection at the moment—the heaving moonlit seas, the dark hull of the *torpilleur* sparkling like some great firework with the flashes of bursting shell, the long white streaks of her torpedoes gleaming for the moment and then vanishing past our quarter, and in the near foreground the fiery streams from our Maxim broadside. It was but for a few seconds; then the enemy slackened and broached to, and in an instant she had vanished. There was no bursting boiler, no swirl in the sea to speak of; simply she was gone like a dream.

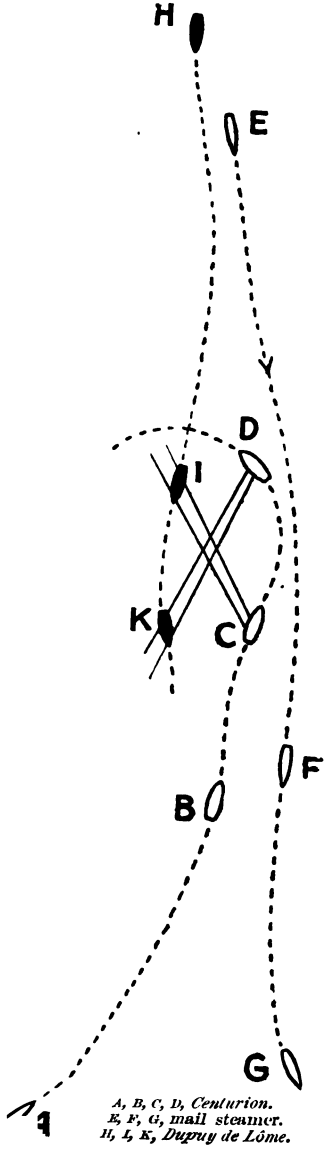
Her consort had clearly been confused by our sudden change of course, and perhaps also by the consciousness of being discovered, and of her own danger. She now headed up to windward, and attempted to escape. She might attempt—round came the ship broadside on to her, and kept steadily on just out of range of her torpedoes. For some reason or other she clearly did not mean to run before the wind; escape with the wind and sea on her beam she could not, as we knew; so our skipper did not hurry matters, but still kept steadily on, firing single shots at her just to show what we could do.

The day was now fast breaking, with the grey and *sickly light of a* stormy dawn, and the enemy, or, *ther, the chase* (for she no longer attempted to resist)

was struggling on against wind and sea, the waves continually making a clean breach over her. Even our forecastle was at times under water with the head seas, but notwithstanding this we had to reduce speed in order to keep her on our beam. We were firing with our 12-pounders, and we saw shell after shell burst over or aboard her, until just after sunrise she struck.

We lowered boats with some difficulty, and our junior lieutenant went off to take possession. We watched them as they approached and boarded the prize; then we could see men taking to the boats again quickly and pushing off. Presently they were alongside, bringing with them the survivors of the French crew, but long before that the second *torpilleur* had sunk like the first. The survivors were all wounded, most of them severely, and their account of the effect of our 12–pounder shells was very satisfactory. The lieutenant in command was among those rescued; one of the ward-room cabins was cleared for him, the rest were sent to the sickbay, except two, over whom the surgeons shook their heads. These two were, I fancy, attended to last; at all events, they went, not to hammocks, but to a quiet berth under the forward bridge, where they are lying now, with their own ensign spread over them.

The prisoners told the skipper something about an armoured vessel with which they were cruising, and a British ship which the three had engaged and sunk some two days before. We had piped down from quarters, and we of the ward-room were just sitting down to breakfast when the Commander told us this piece of news, which, as you may imagine, made us tremendously excited. We despatched that breakfast pretty quickly, and almost as soon as it was over the drum beat to general quarters. I saw all my men at their stations, the guns loaded, the current on, the



A, B, C, D, Centurion.
E, F, G, mail steamer.
H, I, K, Dupuy de Lôme.

hydraulic gear properly filled up and ready; then I went into the gun-shield and took my place there. Seeing the Captain on the lower bridge close to me, I asked his leave to work my guns from there; it was coming on very thick at times, and besides my own taste for fighting in the open air, I doubted whether we could use the mirror sights effectually in such a light. He hesitated a little, and then told me to do what I thought best, so I stayed where I was. I telephoned down to fill up the feed-gear of each lift, and have six more rounds ready; we already had one in each gun, and two more on their way up in each lift, so that we had fifteen rounds ready for each gun. Then I waited, looking out through the manhole at the driving rain and the tossing, foam-flecked sea.

About an hour and a half passed like this. I heard afterwards that the people down below voted it very slow indeed, and I began to think so myself,

when suddenly there sounded the sharp boom of a shotted gun somewhere ahead. Instantly the Captain's word rang out for full steam, and she promptly quickened to her fighting speed. The seas kept flooding her fore-castle, but not so much so as to prevent my working the guns; besides, the skipper kept her head about a point and a half off the wind, so it was not as if we were steaming dead in the wind's eye. Presently there came the boom of another gun, then the hoarse screech of a Maxim, then from out of the rain and fog a shot came across the seas, sending up spouts of foam at each ricochet. Next we saw a dim shadow on the port bow, which swiftly deepened into a long white-painted mail steamer, with the blue ensign flying, and one of her funnels shot away. She passed close by us, hardly a cable's length off. Looking out of my manhole I could see her wrecked deck-houses, and her people waving their hands and cheering. And at that very moment there appeared another dim shadow dead ahead. There was a bright flash from the shadow, and the flame and smoke of a bursting shell on the steamer's decks. As it cleared I saw two girls, who had been waving to us an instant before, lying together in a heap. I telephoned to the subs. to lay our guns on that shadow, and fingered the firing-lever.

Swiftly it deepened into the unmistakable outline of the *Dupuy de Lôme*, with her ugly ends and her two unequal funnels. 'Engage as your guns bear,' said the tiny voice of the telephone from the conning-house close at my ear—even at that moment it put me in mind of the gnat in 'Alice in Wonderland.'[3] The sights came fair on the enemy and I fired. Her broad-side sounded at the same moment as the roar of our

[3] Telephones are said to be too indistinct for use at sea. A 'loud-sounding' telephone has recently been brought out which may possibly be more satisfactory.

guns, and there was a crash and a rattle somewhere about our decks. All that I knew or could think of was the task of watching those sights, and firing as they bore. Somehow I did it fairly, not as well as I could have wished, but still fairly. She swept quickly past, and it was not easy to see one's mark with the bright blaze and drifting smoke of the two great guns always before one's eyes, and the reeking fumes of the cordite eddying round one every time that a breech was opened. Presently there came a pause in our fire, and at that moment she vanished from my sight behind the bridge, though I now could hear the Maxims roaring like rushing water and the boom of C——'s guns thundering every five seconds or so like the taps of a big drum. My two guns stood empty and waiting with their breech-blocks run out, and no charges came up. My questions down the telephone brought for answer, 'Aye, aye, sir,' but nothing else. The ship was now swinging round under her starboard helm, and in a second or two the guns would bear again, and still they were empty. I was thinking of rushing down to see what was the matter when the charges came up. The two guns closed their breeches with a clank, and we were in firing gear again just as the ship stood well across the enemy's stern, and brought my guns once more to bear. I was actually pulling down the firing-lever when the tiny voice at my ear said, 'Cease firing.' Then I looked at the enemy and saw that her colours were gone. Her foremast had been shot away and had fallen all along her decks. Her great funnel had been wrecked, either by our fire or by the fall of the foremast, and her upper works had been frightfully cut up. Boats were called away and the first lieutenant boarded her, and soon we saw the white ensign flying over the *tricolour. Then we left* her and ran down to find the *mail steamer.*

THE PRIZE

We had not long to search for her, and I accompanied our Captain and all our surgeons on board. Well, you don't want a description of non-combatants cut up with shells and Maxims, so I will leave out what we saw. The worst of it had been put to rights, but the first officer, his captain having been cut in two by a shell, took us round to the starboard side and without a word showed us those two poor girls, still lying in a heap together as I had seen them fall. We all stood bareheaded for a minute and then moved away, our Captain muttering something about courts-martial. Then, leaving the surgeons on board and promising to send help to refit her, we jumped into our boats again (nasty work it was in such a sea as that) and pulled off to our own ship. We did not go aboard: she hove lines to us and towed us astern towards the prize. As we neared her we cast off the lines and then boarded her, with a great deal of difficulty, for she was almost out of control, and the heavy seas breaking on her sides made it dangerous work to go near her. Once on board we stood dismayed at the ruin that those brief seconds had wrought. Of the destruction of her upper works we had all seen something, but of the state of her main-deck we had entertained no conception. She is clad all over, as you may know, with four-inch armour—not thick enough to be of the slightest use against our heavy guns, but just thick enough to make every shell unfailingly burst inboard. And certainly every shell that hit had burst with awful effect. Spar and main decks were started; every turret was wrecked; not a man seemed to have escaped from her main-deck; those on her spar-deck had been mown down by the Maxims as by fiery scythes. She was leaking all along her water-line, notwithstanding her coffer-dams, and, indeed, if no help had been near, she *must soon* have foundered. Our prize crew had got to

work already to rig a jury funnel, and as soon as that was done the first lieutenant was confident that he could get the steam-pumps to work and manage to keep her afloat.

There were a number of men aboard her helping the prize crew, who certainly were bluejackets, and as certainly not our fellows, and I was about to ask who they were and where they came from, when I stumbled upon M——, whom you knew as navigating lieutenant of the *Gibraltar*. We stared at each other in surprise, and both at the same moment said, 'Halloa! where have you come from?' He answered first—

'Come from? I come from the hold of this d——d Frenchman, who sank our poor old craft three days ago. Where do you come from?'

'I come from our ship out yonder; we have paid your score for you anyhow.'

'Your ship? Which of the lot is yours?'

'Which of the lot?—why, there is but one.'

'Is but one—why, where are the rest of the fleet?'

'There is no fleet, only our own ship, the *Centurion*.'

'No fleet? Why surely this beggar has been happening on to a fleet of battle-ships.'

'What on earth made you think of that?'

'Why, the awful fire we heard crashing over head—we made sure that there must be four ships firing at the least; no one ship ever built could have "hosed" her so.'

'Well, I don't know; I fancy I sent her some eighteen shells myself.'

'You sent her eighteen shells yourself! You don't want me to believe all that?'

'No, not if you don't like, but I did it.'

He stared more incredulously than ever, and then I was sent for by the Captain and the conversation ended for the time.

In about three hours' time the big funnel was so far repaired that the boilers could all be worked again, and the steam pumps were clearing the ship. By this time both ships had rejoined the mail steamer, and our surgeons, having given all the assistance they could, boarded the prize, while I accompanied our own Captain back on board the *Centurion*. He had refused to permit the surviving French officers to keep their swords, but beyond this nothing could be said; their captain and senior lieutenants, who were responsible for their fatal fire and the death of those poor girls, were dead; and besides what will you have?—if a liner persists in refusing to be brought to by a man-of-war she must expect to be fired upon.

What a change it was to get on board our own ship! Two or three shells had burst on board her, a couple of Maxims were disabled, some black patches and smashed bulkheads disfigured her main deck, and that was all. No heaps of mangled corpses, no pools of blood, no tangled masses of wreckage; but for the traces of the shells we might never have been in action at all. The Captain called up C—— and myself, thanked us heartily for our services at the heavy guns, and so dismissed us, and we went to the ward-room thinking not a little of ourselves. In the ward-room was the Commander, and he fell foul of me in an instant.

'I'll tell you what it is—if you didn't go aloft to see the fighting, but stayed at your proper station below, where you could work your guns just as well, your fellows wouldn't be getting their gear hitched when it was most wanted.'

I did not at first know what he meant, though I had a shrewd notion that he referred to that unlucky pause in sending up the ammunition.

'What do I mean? Why, I mean that one of *your confounded* fellows tried to put a charge of pow-

der into the feed-gear where the shot should go, and because he couldn't all the rest of that gang got blocked, and the gang below thought something was wrong and stopped working accordingly. If you had been below it wouldn't have happened—as it was your subs. lost their heads and I had to sort the lot—I did it too.'

This last I did not doubt; however, I made as proper an answer as I could and the matter ended. Myself, I half think the Commander is right; I hate those mirror sights, it is true, but I could use them if only I tried, and there is no doubt that, trusting as I now do in the guns, my proper place is below, where I can keep an eye on the men.

This evening we buried the two poor Frenchmen from the *torpilleur*. Their lieutenant insisted on being carried on deck to see it, and their comrades stood next the grating. It was a grave and quiet scene, a fit ending to a day of battle.

This morning we had an addition to our ward-room mess at breakfast in the shape of M——, whom the first lieutenant sent away from the prize to find more comfortable quarters on board this ship. It was my watch below after breakfast, and so many of our men being away we could not have the usual general quarters; so I determined to have a morning by myself at that sighting gear. I readily got permission to have the current turned on, and was on my way to the platform deck when M—— suddenly accosted me with, 'What did you say yesterday about those eighteen shells; surely you were gammoning?' So I asked him to come and see, and we spent some half an hour or so looking at the two guns and their gear. At last he said, 'Ah! three days ago we would have given our *lives for one of those.*' After that he stayed with me *the rest of that watch*, taking turns himself at the

sights when they made me dizzy; but on the whole I have got quite sufficiently used to them to be sure that I can work the guns from below as well as from aloft, even at night. M—— has gone crazy over this ship—says she is the finest fighting machine ever seen—wants the skipper to have him as a volunteer, and so on.

They have patched up both the prize and the mail steamer, and M—— will see them both safe home to Plymouth with his *Gibraltars*. Our own loss is—one man wounded, and that slightly!

For myself I am as well as ever, and now these notes must go off with the prize. Farewell.

LETTER V

Centurion, Gibraltar.

We came on here without further adventures, and now we have filled up our bunkers, replaced the two Maxims, made good our other small damages, and taken in fresh ammunition, so we are ready again for anything. I have had my people pretty constantly at their quarters, working with Morris tubes, and I don't think they will go wrong over that feed-gear again. I cannot make out how they did it then, except that it was the first time they had ever worked the guns in earnest, and I suppose that the least thing upset them. Myself, I have got used to that strange mirror arrangement, and so, too, have my subs.; we can all of us now work from the platform decks just as well as from the shields, but I have great doubts about night work. I think, after all, that if we have any night fighting I shall have to aim from the shield.

The *Hornet* came in yesterday with orders from the *Admiral; all* that we know is that we are to stay here

for the present. There is no news of any sort stirring, unless we may reckon as news a sort of indistinct rumour of hard fighting somewhere, but the garrison people say that it is only the echo of our own doings. The *Hornet* stays here as tender.

LETTER VI

Royal Oak, Gibraltar.

You ask for a detailed story, but there is but little to add to what you know already. The *Centurion* is gone, the *Charlemagne* and the *Latouche Tréville* are in port here, and that is about all. I will go on with my disjointed notes where I left off; they are just as they were written, and this must be their excuse. When they come to an end I will try to write better.

I sent off my last letter by a Yankee tramp bound for Liverpool. She had hardly cleared the bay when the *Havock* came in with news, the purport of which we soon knew by the sixty-three guns that pealed out from the Rock. But, even while the salute was being fired, our own signal was hoisted to recall men on shore, and all hands were called to warp the ship in nearer to the New Mole. The harbour tugs helped us, and in half an hour we had her moored close inside the *Massilia*, who happened to be in port; then we lowered her funnels and topmasts and slacked out her standing rigging, so that it would have been difficult indeed for anyone a mile or so out at sea to tell that a powerful battleship was in port. Meanwhile, we could see the *Havock* taking in coal and the *Hornet* getting up steam, and, as you may imagine, all sorts of rumours were flying about the ship. There had been a battle; the salutes were a blind and a sham; why did not the *Captain take us out to fight* instead of hiding the ship *in that fashion? and so on*—the sort of thing that one

has to pretend not to hear. Presently the Captain sent both for C—— and me to accompany him in his gig. On reaching the gangway we found the Commander with him, and all four of us were pulled on board the *Hornet*, who immediately weighed and stood out to sea. Meanwhile we heard the whole news of the battle of Cartagena, but with an addition which you did not see in the newspapers. The Admiral had sent word that the leading squadron of the enemy had never been engaged at all; they had kept steadily on their course while the rear squadron was being cut to pieces, and from this he had inferred that some serious combination was in hand. Whatever it was, his own fleet had too little coal left and too many ships damaged to pursue, and the orders were that the *Centurion* and any other ships in port were to defeat the enemy's designs at all hazards. The *Havock* had reported that the enemy's squadron consisted of four ships, and that they were now nearing the Rock. To this news the Captain added that he proposed to observe them carefully as they passed the Rock, and he especially wished C—— and me to do so also, so as to know what parts of the enemy's ships we were to attack.

C—— asked him if he proposed to engage the enemy in the Gut; the Captain said No, he thought not; to fight in narrow waters would be to lose the advantage of our great speed. His plan was to let the enemy pass and then pursue them, and seek to take them in detail, and with this view he had concealed the ship. I do not know exactly what we thought; I believe I could have wished to find myself at close quarters with my two guns making a quick end of the thing one way or another. But whatever we both thought it was not for us to criticise the Captain's plans, even if *they had not* been as wise as they undoubtedly were

By this time we were well clear of the bay, and

could easily make out the enemy in the offing to the east of the Rock. With the glass we could identify a battleship of the *Charlemagne* class; another, which must be either the *Jauréguiberry* or the *Carnot*; a third, which must be either the *Bouvines* or *Tréhouart*, and a cruiser of the *Bruix* class. On referring to such information as we had of the French fleet at Toulon, and of the ships taken or sunk at Cartagena, we were tolerably sure that our opponents were the *Charlemagne*, the *Jauréguiberry*, the *Tréhouart* and the *Latouche Tréville*—a force sufficient to sink the *Centurion* three times over. Still, that was not the question; the point was, what mischief could she do to them first?

We now stood across the bay to see what could be made out of the *Centurion*, and satisfied ourselves that she was as nearly invisible as might be. Then the enemy being already off Europa Point, we ran into Europa Bay to have a good view of them as they passed.

They came on slowly, and we reached our intended berth under the Buena Vista batteries some time before they cleared Europa Point. It was a glorious sight to see the great ships passing with a slow and stately movement in the bright evening sunshine. From where we lay we could see the colours of uniforms and the glitter of arms on their bridges. The sea was perfectly calm, and there was just enough ripple along their massive sides to set them off to perfection. First, and a long distance ahead, came the *Latouche Tréville*; next came the *Charlemagne*, carrying a rear-admiral's flag; then the *Tréhouart*; and last of all the *Jauréguiberry*. They did not stop to look into the bay, nor did they send in any torpedo craft; indeed they had none with them except the launches which they carried on their decks. C—— and I watched them carefully,

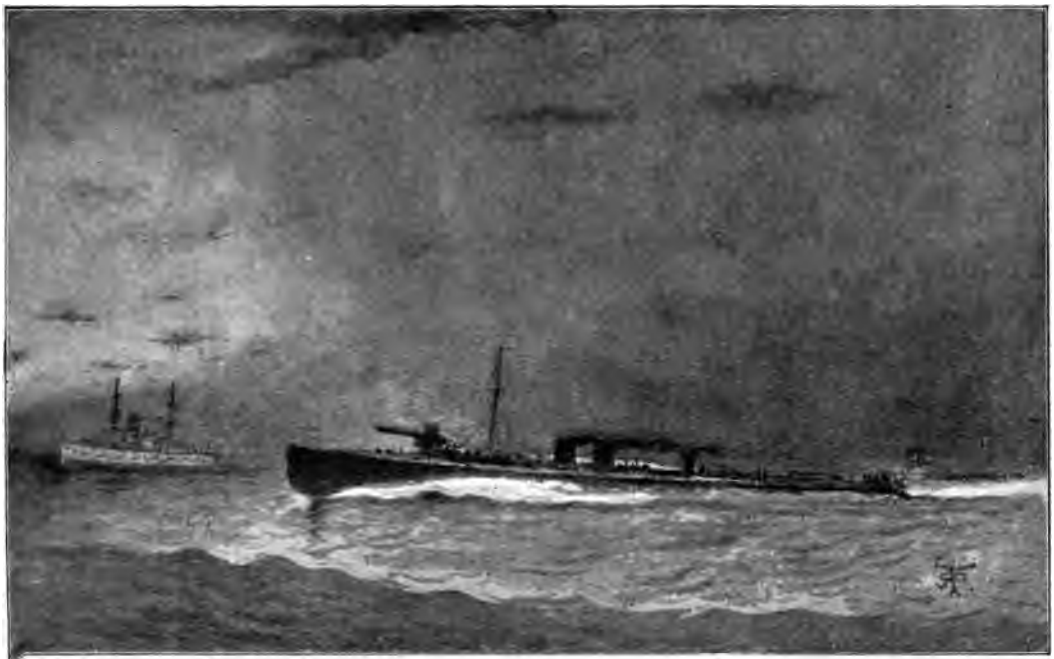
wondering what we should aim at. We soon concluded that the *Charlemagne* was the easiest to deal with so far as we were concerned, for we would fire at her long midship battery, and would be tolerably confident of causing such slaughter and demoralisation as to put her *hors de combat* for an hour or so. Of the *Tréhouart* we thought least of all: her belt rises so little above the water that our Maxims would quickly make her unseaworthy. We both agreed that in fighting the *Latouche Tréville* we should fire low and try to hit her belts. As for the *Jauréguiberry* we differed: C—— thinking that he would fire at her belt, I preferring to aim at the turrets of her heavy guns.

We now left our berth and steamed slowly after them; we knew that the *Hornet* had been seen, and we wished to make out as much as we could before rejoining our own ship. As we approached, the *Jauréguiberry* fired a few rounds from her light guns, which threw up jets of foam in front of our bows, but did no mischief, and she ceased even this fire when she saw that we meant to keep our distance. We tried to make out what launches they carried, but we were too far off, and it would have been foolhardy to go nearer; so we changed course and stood back towards the New Mole, and were soon on board our own ship again.

There we found steam up, and the ship cleared for action, only the crew were not yet at their quarters. The *Havock* had finished coaling, and was close astern with full steam ready. The *Jauréguiberry* was now shut in behind Carnero Point, the sun was sinking in a golden haze over Algeciras, and the sightseers, both on Spanish and English shores, were dispersing to their quiet homes, when the order was given to cast loose from the *Massilia* and proceed at three-quarter speed. The night fell quickly, and as soon as we were well under way, the *Havock* went ahead to reconnoitr

while we followed her without changing our speed. She was some time away, and we were already clear of the Gut when we saw her returning at full speed and flashing signals to us. What the signals were I could not make out, for before they were fairly begun the drum beat to quarters, and I went below.

My people were already at their stations with the magazines open, and the usual fifteen cartridges per gun ready. Quickly I went over the gear with my two subs., and then we fitted the luminous sights, and returned to the platform deck. A change, indeed, it was; above it was now a dark, though starlight night, with a cold wind blowing. Every light was put out; hardly a man was visible, and the ship seemed like a huge phantom speeding over the iron-grey waters. Below the long narrow passages—fighting decks we call them—were brilliantly lit with the electric light, and alive with men, all at their several duties or stations, and there was a warm homelike feeling about the whole which was strangely at variance with the business in hand. In one respect our general quarters were changed since our fight with the *Dupuy de Lôme*. That fight had shown clearly that a mass of small-arm men standing idly on parade was a great drawback; they could hardly ever be wanted for boarding or repelling boarders, and standing there doing nothing they got impatient and almost insubordinate themselves, and made others excited and impatient too; so this time a number of men had been sent away in our two torpedo launches, and the steam pinnace which went with them; a number of others were sent forward and aft to help the torpedo gangs; and yet others were told off to examine, and if possible refill, the cartridges of the Maxims as they were returned to the fighting decks. *As for the heavy cartridges*, no one seemed to think of *refilling them on the spot*, and yet they were just as fit



'HAVOCK' FLASHING SIGNALS

for it as those of the Maxims. But I did not care about this; I knew that I had fifty rounds per gun ready filled, and even if I were as wasteful as I fear I was over the *Dupuy de Lôme*, still there was little doubt that they would see us through any continuous fight. The effect of thus lessening the parade on the fighting decks was to give more room, and greatly to enhance the idea of united and orderly duty, which is always so striking on board the *Centurion*. I ought to add that the whole of the warm, well-lit, orderly scene was roofed in with screens, which had been rigged to prevent the loom of the lights showing through gratings and skylights, and gave the effect of a tent-roof.

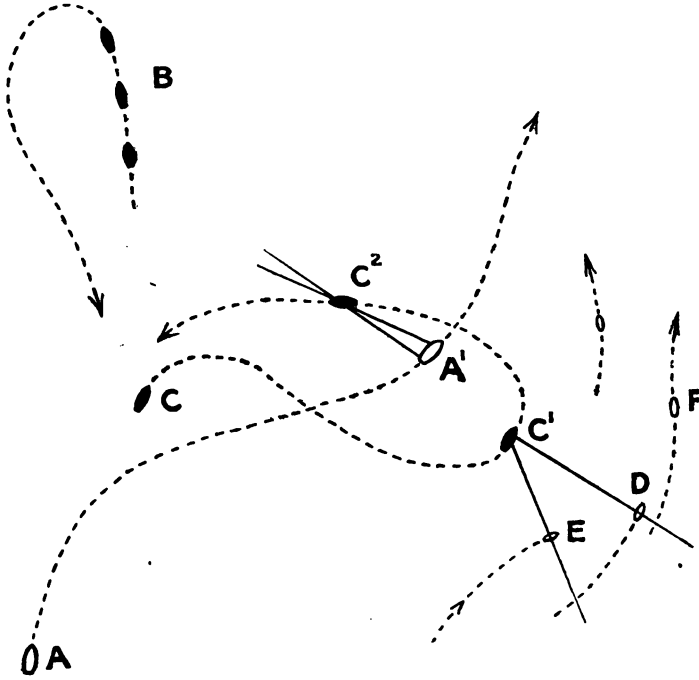
To look through my mirror sights was exactly like turning from a bright crowded ball-room to look through the window into a dark night. I could see the white spots of the luminous sights, and that was all that I could see; it was of no use looking and pretending that one could see the sky-line or anything else, the thing was simply hopeless. My subs. said the same, so at length I sent to the Commander and asked leave to go back to the shield. I watched him as he got the message, and I could see that it made him very grumpy, but at that minute he received a message, delivered by one of C——'s middies, which (as I heard afterwards) was just the same. The end of it was that he came to me and tried the sights himself, and finally told me to go where I liked, provided only I fought the guns somehow. I did not wait for another word; the next moment I was going as fast as I could up the iron ladders inside the barbette, and as soon as I was in my place in the shield I telephoned down to the subs. to leave me to do the training and sighting. Then I looked out through the manhole and tried to *realise what* was going on.

A weird sight it was. The night, as I have sai

was starlight, but there were banks of fog on the water which were very confusing; sometimes objects at a great distance were visible, sometimes others near at hand were concealed. This it was, beyond doubt, which made the mirror sights useless; it was impossible when using them to realise the effect of the fog-banks, and the result was simple mystification. Now being in the open air I succeeded in making out the three battleships a long way off, apparently in line ahead, while much nearer to us was the *Latouche Tréville*, evidently uneasy and constantly flashing round her search-lights. Their effect on the banks of rolling mist was most wonderful: sometimes they seemed half obscured, at other times the whole sky and sea seemed indistinctly luminous, and yet again the fog-banks seemed to take strange and spectral shapes, or the spots from which the rays had just been deflected turned to utter blackness. On a sudden an answering search-light flashed out; every line of the enemy's cruiser stood out like burnished silver against the dark background, and the flash and roar of her lighter pieces broke the silence of the night. Instantly the strange light vanished, then another flashed out, to be saluted with another discharge, and so on, like two will-of-the-wisps at play.

What all this meant I did not know, but I divined at once that our skipper would make for the cruiser before she could be supported by her own battleships. She was about three points on our starboard bow, and so I promptly trained my two guns over on that side, and then kept watching her over the sights, expecting every second to hear the voice of the telephone at my ear. And now the baffling clouds of mist seemed to close in upon us, and it became increasingly difficult to see the cruiser—all the more so from the strange loom of the search-lights in the fog. All at once she sounded

signals with her siren, and then seemed to quicken to full speed, taking a wide sweep to our starboard as she did so. I just got a moment's glance towards the battleships through a lane in the fog, and fancied that they were changing course to port, but at that moment we ported and stood after the cruiser, and I had no



A, A', *Centurion*; B, enemy's battleships; C, C', C², *Latouche Tréville*; D, *Havock* blown up; E, launch sunk; F, *Hornet*.

more time to think of anything else. She was now well on our starboard bow—that I knew—but she had switched off her own search-lights, and where she was exactly it was impossible to tell in the fog. There was one blur in the night where the mist looked darker than elsewhere, and on that I kept my gun

trained as well as I could; and from that blur there suddenly came the blaze and roar of a heavy discharge, followed instantly by a bright blue flash and a sharp ringing explosion somewhere at a distance: then all was as dark and still as death.

For a few seconds I could see nothing, then my eyes got used to the blackness, and I made out a phantom shape swiftly crossing our bows some eight or nine cables ahead. As swiftly my guns followed her; we closed in on her quickly, and the telephone spoke, 'Fire low as the guns bear.' Guns bear indeed! Mine had borne for some time, and on the instant I got a fair elevation and pulled over the lever, and the flame of the great guns scattered the darkness. Just at that moment there came the flash and roar of an answering broadside; then we sped swiftly past her stern, no longer in darkness, for our Maxims gave a flickering daylight, paling every other second before the broad blaze of a heavy gun. It was only for half a minute or so; then she vanished, and the mist settled down thicker than ever. Somewhere away on our port beam were the enemy, now reunited—we could tell that by the shouting and the flashing of lights. Ourselves, we kept on our course, and soon were in the starlit night once more, while astern of us the mist was silvered by the rising moon.

Overhead the siren was pealing out signals for the light craft to rejoin us, and it seemed as if the fighting was over for the night. Myself, I could not understand it in the least. I should have thought that an enemy more or less surprised and caught in those fog banks gave us just the opportunity we wanted, but the skipper apparently thought otherwise. We piped down and the watch was set, and the thing was over. My subs. dismissed the men below at once, as I thought it no great sin to leave the guns loaded and ready: and then, in-

stead of going below, I stepped down on to the deck and got out by stooping below the shield, and so went aft.

The fire of the *Latouche Tréville* had done more mischief than I thought. Two of our boats were completely wrecked on their davits, several windsails were knocked to pieces, and no less than four Maxims were dismounted. Men were already at work clearing the wreck, and it was my watch below, so I went down at once to the ward-room, to find that a heavy shell had gone clean through my cabin without doing much mischief, had passed through the ward-room, and had burst in a cabin to starboard, wrecking it and those on each side of it. Finding my own belongings tolerably in order, I am sitting down to write these notes.

While I am writing our steam pinnace comes on board with news serious enough. That flash which we saw in the fog was the end of the *Havock*. A shot from the *Latouche Tréville* struck one of her torpedoes and blew her to pieces; the few survivors of her crew were picked up by the pinnace. We hear, too, that one of our second-class launches has been sunk during the night; so on the whole we have very little to boast of.

As soon as it was light enough to see anything we were all of us on the alert trying to catch a glimpse of the enemy. With the dawn there came a fresh wind from the west that rolled away the fog-banks before it, leaving a sky without a cloud, except some rolling wool-packs in the wind's eye that might mean dirty weather to come. The watch on deck had cleared away the wreck and splinters about our decks; and except for the smashed and empty pedestals of the dismounted Maxims and the great gap in our quarter where the ward-room cabins were blown away, there was but little

trace of our night's work. We could see a mile or so away on our port quarter the *Hornet* and our own surviving torpedo launch on duty as videttes, and beyond them was the mass of fog-bank drifting away before the wind.

Eagerly we watched that fog-bank drifting away, and soon we saw some dark shapes standing out just as a pale and watery sun shone over the sea. To those who could look at these signs it was clear that our coming battle would be fought in heavy weather, but most of us had no eyes for the weather. There were the enemy under easy steam, but instead of their line ahead they were formed in two divisions. First came the *Charlemagne* and *Jauréguiberry* in line abeam, then some distance astern were the *Tréhouart* and—was that crippled wreck with her heavy list, her mainmast gone, and her decks swept, the proud and stately *Latouche Tréville*? We all had to take a second look to make sure—and then we saw with the glass the white streams spouting from her pumps, and boats busily plying, apparently taking off wounded. C—— and I were standing with the marine officer, who was congratulating us on our gunnery, when the Commander joined us and said that the drum would beat to quarters as soon as the ship's company had had their breakfast, and the orders were strict that everyone was to get it coolly and without excitement, for no one could tell how long the thing would last. So we went down to our battered ward-room together, and as I went I asked the Commander why we had not continued the fight the night before. He said he did not know; now that he saw what we had done, he only wished we had done more of it. 'But you know,' he added, 'that these quick rushes, where the whole thing is done in a few seconds, *are new to us all*—if I had been in the Captain's place *I don't know that* I should have cared for a raid on

those three ships all at once—and yet now I believe that it might have been done in the fog and in the night.' Then I asked how our people had got on while C—— and I were in the shields, and to this he answered, 'Pretty well; but if I were you I would keep with them as much as I could. You know it makes it quite another thing when the men *see* their officer among them handling the sights.'

We gulped down our coffee and had hardly done so when the drum beat. I knew my guns were ready, for they had been left so; I took a glance at the gauges, saw my men at their stations and the charges ready, and took my place at the mirror sights. And how different it was from that puzzling fog the night before! Now I could see what was going on almost as well as if I was on deck. We were running down towards the enemy almost at full speed, and their leading division hoisted their colours and opened fire with their light guns. The effect I could not see; once I thought I heard a crash overhead, as if something had hit us, but at that moment we ported and changed course, and the enemy were quickly shut out from my sight. We now kept on our new course nearly at full speed, as we could tell by the motion of the engines, but for the rest we knew as little of the progress of the fight as if we had been aboard a hulk in Portsmouth.

I have written these notes so far in the interval of this dreary wait. We are all keeping our men at such work as we can, but notwithstanding this it is deadly dull. Occasionally there is the crash and rattle of a shell overhead—not very often, for the enemy seem to be making very bad practice—more often I can see, as I glance at my mirrors, their shells ricochetting far ahead. There is a heavy swell running, and our fore-*castle is* constantly flooded with the green seas, an

this, no doubt, accounts for the bad practice and slow fire of the enemy.

At this point my notes cease; I am now writing at my ease on board the *Royal Oak*, but I cannot help the bad style, so you must forego the promised amendment.

After a long time spent in dreary waiting, we, of the forward guns, could see, on looking down the long fighting decks, some movement among C——'s men astern, that was not mere drill. Presently one of his guns boomed out; then there was a long pause; then another roar, then another pause. The next thing we heard was more crash overhead, but nothing came of it; whatever it was that had gone, it had no effect on us in our 'shelter-trench.' For a long time this went on, C——'s guns firing very slowly, and at still longer intervals something hitting our upper works.

At noon the men's dinners were brought round to them, as they stood at their quarters, but it was more a form than not; still it showed our Captain's purpose to play a waiting game, and, therefore, not to have his men knocked up at the outset. This was clear, and thoroughly disgusted I was; I knew that I could make those Frenchmen feel, if only I was given the chance, and loafing about on the platform decks, doing nothing, was simply sickening. The more I thought of it the more angry I got, but it was no use being angry. The mess-tins disappeared, having at least had the good effect of giving the men something to do and think about, and I took a look at the sea through my mirror sights. There was no doubt that there was going to be a dirty night, the swell was getting higher and steeper, and the green seas were now thundering on our forecastle every minute. I could not work the guns ahead in this sea—could I work them abeam? Just as the thought came

into my head, the telephone voice said, 'Stand by to engage to starboard.' Instantly we trained over our guns: every man along the fighting decks was on the alert; the Commander, who had been talking to the fourth lieutenant, stepped instantly in front of the lower wheel, just below the trunk which leads up to the conning-house—and then there was another pause. I began to think it all a false alarm when I heard our starboard engines stop and reverse; by the sights I saw she was swiftly swaying round, and in a moment came into view the *Jauréguiberry*, bow on, some six cables off. The training was fair on her and the elevation very steady—all that I did was to keep the firing lever over whenever the aim was dead on her. Exactly what we were aiming at I could not tell for the flame and the smoke (cordite has smoke), and the swaying motion, but I knew that we were not far off her forward turret, if not actually on it. Quickly we were round the sixteen points and were passing her starboard to starboard, for she made no attempt to ram or use her torpedoes, and instead she sheered off as if out of control. We shifted our aim to her midship turret and continued the fire. Just at this moment there was a spurt of flame somewhere close to me, and I was sickened with the well-known stench of the melinite fumes. But my guns were firing: I controlled my dizziness enough to keep the aim still on the enemy, and in another moment she was out of my sight astern, and I pulled up the firing lever again. The fumes of the melinite quickly passed. 'K——, come on deck sharp,' said a telephone voice at my ear—but it was my own telephone that sounded, the one that was fitted for my own use, in speaking to the men below, when in the shield, not that from the conning-house. I jumped up the ladder, but as I went I saw a figure stretched out by the lower wheel that I knew too well

—it was the dead body of the Commander. The shield was empty, but just behind it was the Captain standing on the cleats at its back.

'What shall we do? The trunk of the conning-house is blown away, the whole place disabled, and the first lieutenant dead. Can you spare me the use of your telephone, and go on yourself working from below?'

'Yes, sir; and if you wish, I can disconnect in a few minutes and connect it to the lower deck direct.'

'Good; you shall do so as soon as ever we have settled those fellows. Where is the Commander? I sent for him on deck.'

'The Commander is down, sir.'

'Down! Stay where you are; leave your sights to your people below. Pass my orders, and let one of your people stand by your telephone, and pass them on to the lower wheel.'

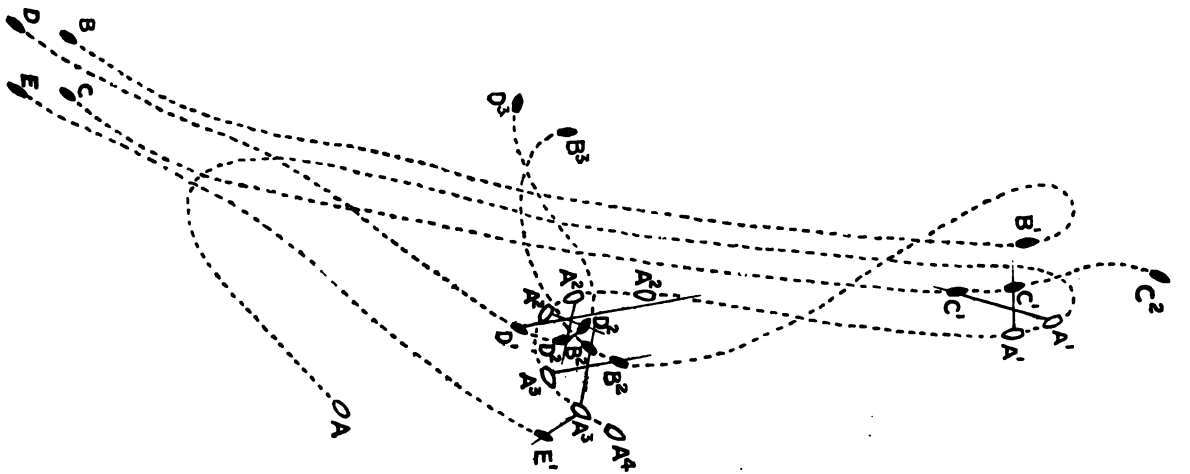
It was the work of a second to pass down the order and take my place, and then I tried to take in the situation. We were running down at full speed before the wind and sea towards the enemy's second division, the *Tréhouart* and *Latouche Tréville*, who were hull down in the offing, but rising into view every minute.

'We shall have time to settle those two before the others can interfere with us,' said the Captain in his place just behind me.

'Are the others astern, sir?'

'Yes, I gave them the slip nicely, and you and C—— have given them something else. I don't think the *Jauréguiberry* is good for much more.'

As he spoke a shell came howling overhead and ricochetted along the sea in front of us, throwing up jets of spray but not bursting. Then came another, which also went wide of us; then came one of C——'s middies to ask whether he was to return the fire.



A, *Centurion* in the morning ; A¹, A², A³, *Centurion* during the fight ; A⁴, *Centurion* after the fight ; B, *Charlemagne* in the morning ; B¹, *Charlemagne* changing course ; B², *Charlemagne* during the fight ; B³, *Charlemagne* after the fight ; C, *Jauréguiberry* in the morning ; C¹, *Jauréguiberry* crippled by *Centurion* ; C², *Jauréguiberry* after the fight ; D, *Tréhouart* in the morning ; D¹, D², *Tréhouart* during the fight ; D³, *Tréhouart* sinking ; E, *Latouche Tréville* ; E¹, *Latouche Tréville* striking.

'By no means,' was the answer; 'let him train his guns over to port and stand by to engage on that side.'

The middy went back and I passed the word down to my own subs. to see the ammunition all ready, and to train my two guns over. Very swiftly we neared the enemy, and now we could see that the *Latouche Tréville* was utterly *hors de combat*. The wreck on her decks was cleared away to some extent, but most of her after guns seemed to be disabled, and her list, though not heavier than it had been in the morning, was still too heavy to permit of her guns being worked or the slightest manœuvring being attempted in that rough sea. As we neared, the *Tréhouart* came ahead to meet us and cover her consort, reserving her own fire until we were within 2,000 yards. At that range she fired her bow gun and missed. We kept on, meaning to come to closer quarters. For nearly a minute this lasted; then the Captain gave the word to port and fire as the guns bore. For the next minute everything we could fire tore through her, her thin sides not affording the slightest protection even against our Maxims. She made hardly any reply, but starboarded, meaning I suppose to use either ram or torpedo, and just then we starboarded hard too, so that we passed broadside on. She was to windward and rolling heavily in the beam sea. We also were rolling, though not so much, and as we passed her I saw distinctly three 12-inch shells go crashing into her decks. The skipper sprang up into the lower bridge to see what was happening, and conned ship from the lee of the wrecked conning-house, signalling to me with his arms while I passed the word down. The *Tréhouart* was now astern, and right on our beam we saw the *Charlemagne* coming up hand over hand. For a moment our fire was checked; then as we crossed her we sent her all that we could. She did not

attempt to ram, and we, keeping our helm still starboarded, headed up to windward on her port side, our ship one mass of flame and smoke on both broadsides. As for the *Charlemagne*, the fire of her quick-firing guns ceased as if by magic. I could see that our shells great and small were hulling her fairly, and turned my head to see what our starboard broadside was doing, just in time to see the hapless *Latouche Tréville* hauling down her colours. I think I began a cheer, but if I did it was drowned by a crash somewhere amidships; then the smoke and gases of our furnaces seemed to stream up from everywhere at once except the funnels, and the next instant the word was passed to cease firing; and how still it all seemed after the roar and crash of those minutes of battle!

The *Charlemagne* had run out of action, and one or both of our funnels were shot away somewhere; this much was clear, but what else had happened I could not make out from my place in the shield. The skipper now sent for C—— to take charge of the deck, and posted some 'links' to pass the word to the wheel, and having done this he hailed me to join him on the upper bridge.

A strange sight it was that met our eyes as we looked round from the creaking wreck of the bridge. It was now evening, the sky was black with hurrying clouds, and a heavy westerly gale was bringing up a tremendous swell. Through the driving wrack shot the coppery rays of a stormy sunset, throwing a lurid gleam over the heaving seas and the battered ships. Nearest to us on our starboard quarter was the *Latouche Tréville*, just able to keep her head to wind; much further off, on our port beam, was the *Charlemagne*, also lying to, with her flying deck wrecked and *apparently* some other damage done, but what we could *not make out*. Astern of her was the Trèhouart settlin

down in the trough of the sea with the waves making a clean breach over her, and the steam flying away in clouds to leeward. Far away on the port bow we could see the *Jauréguiberry*, apparently on fire, for a long trail of ropy smoke was streaming away from her before the gale. If anything was wanted to make that wild scene look still wilder it was those two eloquent signals of distress — the black pennon from the burning *Jauréguiberry*, and the white streamers from the sinking *Tréhouart*.

The skipper gave me just time enough to take it all in before he spoke. Then—

'K——, what shall we do? The enemy are crippled as you see; can we possibly continue the fight at once?'

'No, sir, not possibly. You have no control over the ship to speak of, and in an hour's time she will be on fire unless you patch these funnels; as you are you cannot possibly tackle the *Charlemagne*, unless she is much more crippled than I take her to be.'

'It will be a terrible night; we shall not be able to fight until the gale is over, unless we do it now.'

'True, sir, but neither can they escape you. They cannot do anything but lie to, at least I am sure that neither the *Jauréguiberry* nor the *Tréhouart* can; and the other cannot leave them. Their damages they probably cannot repair, ours we can; I would suggest to you to lie to and repair damages during the gale, and then you will have them almost at your mercy when it moderates.'

'Well, perhaps you're——by George, she's gone!'

'Gone—what's gone, sir?'

'The *Tréhouart*; your big shells must have gone *right through* her bottom.'

I had turned as he spoke, and sure enough where *the Tréhouart had* been there was nothing but a

quickly vanishing whirlpool in the rolling seas; one division of the enemy was annihilated at all events.

We looked for a minute, then the skipper turned to me and said, 'We must take possession of that prize somehow; I will see to that; you go below and get all hands to repair damages. Take the funnels first, and then batten the decks and sides as best you can.'

So I left the bridge and tried, at first, to go down the forward stairs near it, but this I found utterly impossible. Thick volumes of black smoke were rolling up, and the very attempt was suffocation; so I went back to the barbette and down the ladders inside until I reached the platform deck. Here I found the air tolerably clear, thanks to the ventilating fans, but the water was coming in showers through the riddled bulkheads and pouring down on the fighting decks. The greater part of the ship's company were assembled on these decks: we had piped down from quarters, but the main-deck was so full of stifling smoke that they had nowhere else to go. I called for willing hands to follow me, and, stooping low with wet cloths to our faces, we went up the stairs and on to the main-deck. Here I met the chief engineer and one of his assistants with some artificers, attempting amid the stifling heat and smoke to telescope the smashed funnels, and at his request we went forward into the bows to get up some sheet iron and bolts and cotters out of the forepeak. Going forward, we found the forward torpedo gangs, who had left their own gear when we piped down, but had been unable to get further aft. I ought to have told you before that at quarters they are quite separated from the rest of the crew by the transverse armour bulkheads where the belt ends, which are carried right up to the main-deck without any aperture. The result was that now they were practically cut off in the bows, and there we found them huddled together in the dark

ness, and drenched by the water that poured through the leaks in our battered decks and topsides. The torpedo lieutenant asked what I was going to do.

'Do? Why, get out some stuff from the forepeak and patch those funnels first; we'll see then what's to be done next.'

I was crusty, I must confess; still, it was trying to be bothered just then. We fumbled our way into the forepeak, found the sheets and bolts and got them on deck, and then dragged them aft as best we could. Coming towards the waist I stumbled across the chief engineer, half insensible from the smoke; he managed to gasp out that the funnels were jammed, and the assistant he thought dead. We carried him forward into the bows, and, finding that the artificers had given it up, we had nothing to do but set to work by ourselves.

Groping about we could make out that a shell had struck and pierced the port funnel, and then gone on and burst in the starboard one, nearly at the level of the main-deck. Clearly the port funnel was the easiest job if only we could get inside the casings. There was a scuttle, which we found after some search; then I and the boatswain contrived to get in and fit two plates over the holes, and next in the fearful heat I managed to mark where the holes in the plates came on the funnel. Then we cut out corresponding holes with sharp punches, pushed through bolts slotted for the cotters, fitted on the plates and quickly secured them. Then we did the same for the outer casing.

This made matters rather better on the main deck, and gave us more idea of what to do with the starboard funnel. That was a far worse business, for the casings and a large part of the funnel itself were blown quite away. We first measured our plates for the work, then we punched the holes in the funnel, next we fitted the

bolts, got the plates into place, and secured them as before. The fires were lowered, no doubt, while we were at work; but still we should never have got it done at all but for our chief engineer's rare forethought in having the materials ready prepared beforehand; as it was it was not a boiler maker's job, though good enough for a smoke-stack.

Long before this was finished all the men who could be spared had been called away to some duty that I did not know. It did not matter to me. The next thing that I had to do was to repair her sides as much as I could. We began by plugging all the cleaner shot-holes. We could not do it from outside, of course, in that sea, but by driving in elastic plugs as well as we could, and then hammering the torn and bent edges round them, we made a fairly shipshape job of them. While the warrant officers were seeing to this I set to work at the worst places further aft, where the plating was altogether blown away. Here we found it impossible to rig collision-mats. We could only force in sheet iron between the frames and secure it with bolts and cotters where we could; unsatisfactory and fearfully hard work with the awful weight of the water beating against us every minute. Luckily for us there were only shot-holes forward in the bows; the places at which we were at work were all abaft the beam, where we did not feel the heavy seas so much. As it was, we only got it finished at the cost of an arm, and one or two ribs or collar bones broken; and I don't think I ever was so tired in my life. The only thing to be said was that when I had done I was cleaner than when I came from those funnels, and not so scorched.

By the time that we had mended the leaks in the sides, from her bows to the after bridge, the day was breaking, and the skipper came down and took a

at the work. The main-deck was now fairly dry and clear of smoke, and it was possible to see what state we were in. The first thing that struck us both was that our Maxim broadside had escaped pretty well; the next was that the work on the sides above the main-deck had made the ship fairly dry, and therefore that there could be no serious injury below it either to her belt or her unarmoured ends. Said the skipper, 'She can fight nearly as well as ever as soon as this gale goes down; meanwhile you fellows must not get knocked up.' So he made the hands who had been at work all night turn in as best they could, and insisted on my doing the same. I found a dry corner, and the next thing that I knew was that some one was shaking me and saying that I had been three hours asleep. On going on deck I found it blowing as hard as ever, but the weather was much thicker. Close astern I could see the *Latouche Tréville* rolling heavily, but not on the whole making such bad weather as I should have expected. The fourth lieutenant was on duty, the Captain lying asleep on a coil of ropes, as much knocked up as I had been. I asked where C—— was, and was told that he had gone aboard the *Latouche Tréville* as prizemaster, the *Hornet* putting him aboard, and then going off to act as vidette. There was no change on our decks, except that the ruined conning-house had sunk down upon the stump of the trunk, leaving the whole forward bridges one mass of wreck. Some extra preventer-stays had been attached to the funnels, and our dead were laid beneath the ensign under the shelter of the weather bulwarks. In action we usually had about twenty-five men on look-out and other duties about the decks, and of these we had had fourteen killed and eight wounded, not counting the *Commander and first lieutenant*—a plain proof of what *we should have suffered* without the 'shelter trench.'

The two officers had been slain by the upward and downward blast of the same shell, the armoured trunk within which it burst acting like the barrel of a gun in directing the force of the explosion; and doubtless the Captain would have been killed also, had he not been outside the conning-house at the moment.

There was nothing to be done but to get together all hands fit for duty, and continue repairing damages. Our upper works astern were so fearfully cut about during the long-continued stern chase of the day before, that the only thing to be done was to batten the main-deck, and prevent the wet getting into the after-hold. There were a great many places forward where the decks needed battening also, and accordingly I set our fellows to work at making them good as far as possible forward and aft. This was not very difficult, as we were sheltered now by our work during the night, and as soon as it was well in hand I was called off to breakfast. On going to my own cabin to see if I could find any clean, not to say dry, clothing, I found nearly everything soaked and destroyed, except, strangely enough, the desk in which I had left the notes which form the earlier part of this letter. I opened it and took them out, together with your own letters, and left everything else.

Here I will stop to-night, for I have written more than I meant already, and there is a good deal more to be told.

That breakfast under the weather bulwarks near the after bridge was a strange meeting. Everything aft was wrecked, as I have told you, and, of course, the usual routine was broken through. Captain and ward-room officers alike sat round on anything that was convenient, in clothes sodden with wet and blackened with the fight and the work afterwards, drinking some *coffee brewed* without the help of the galley—for that *was smashed* too—out of anything that came handy

the captain's and ward-room crockery alike being at a sad discount. And in our circle there was a great gap: C—— was away on his duties as prizemaster, and our Commander and first lieutenant were away too, and at rest. Yet weary, wet, dirty, and lessened in number, we were a proud and happy company; our work was done so far as defeating the enemy's combination was concerned, and it only remained to turn victory into annihilation. What the combination had been we could, of course, only guess, but I suppose every one of us had thought of those four ships fresh and uninjured raising the blockade of Brest; had they done so the Channel Fleet would have had more than enough to do. That risk was over now at all events.

During our meal I asked the Captain whether he proposed to do anything to replace the conning-house. He smiled and said that it was pretty nearly done; he hoped that I had not wanted the engine-room artificers very much, for finding them not at work he had taken them all off for it. Of course I said that I had not wanted them, and was about to speak on some other topic when the signalman reported the *Hornet* close aboard, signalling that the enemy were on the move. We, in our turn, signalled to the prize to make the best of her way either to Gibraltar or to England as soon as the gale broke, and then went ahead in pursuit.

While bearing up I went to see what had been going on during the night to replace the conning-house. I expected to see something new, but I did not expect to see what I did. The space left in each shield for the officer of the barbette to stand in when not on the platform deck had originally been some seven feet long by two wide. It had a scuttle at one end, through which he could step down out of the shield on to the spar-deck, and a manhole with a hood in the middle through which he could look round. Each of these

spaces had been completely altered; the scuttle was now in the middle, and there were two manholes and hoods. The space under one of these manholes was fitted with the old sights, telephones, and levers for the officer of the barbette; the other was fitted with telephones to the wheel, the engine-rooms, the torpedo-rooms, and the other barbette. In this way there was a place made in each shield for the captain as well as the officer of the barbette, or one officer could, if necessary, do the duty of both. The ship could now be commanded from either shield almost as well as from the old conning-house, the only real difference being that the new temporary hoods were not a very secure protection for the heads of the officers. Altogether, it was a wonderful piece of work, reflecting great credit on the torpedo lieutenant, who had designed it and carried it out in fifteen hours of tempest. I took the opportunity of congratulating him on it, and I hope made up for my crustiness the night before.

Having seen this I went back to the Captain, and asked for his orders as to general quarters. The Commander and first and third lieutenants being all gone, and the conning arrangements being so different, it would clearly be necessary to station the officers differently. He replied that he would command the ship from the after shield, and that I must con her from the forward shield, where I should be as much in communication with him through the telephone as if I were by his side; that the fourth lieutenant must take the wheel, and that the subs. must take command of the guns. Considering all things he thought it better that the senior sub. should be in the shield, and sight from there. I asked him whether the dead should be buried, and after a moment's hesitation he answered: 'No; better not just yet. We will finish with these fellows, *and then* they shall have a decent burial—we cannot

think of that just now.' It was kindly meant, but I could not help wondering that he should forget the sailors' superstition, and the effect which it might have on the ship's company.

Having received orders I went below, saw all clear and the men standing by their quarters, and finally looked to the heavy gun ammunition, of which I found barely twenty charges per gun of made-up cartridges left. This would not do, so I sent the crews of some disabled Maxims to get the old cartridge cases out of the tanks in the hold into which they were shot after firing, hammer them out where necessary, and refill them. This I suppose they did; I know no more about it, except that we never had any difficulty from want of cartridges. Then I returned to the spar-deck, and stood by ready to take my place. At present the fourth lieutenant was conning ship from the shield, but as soon as the drum beat he would go below, and I should take his place.

We now sighted the enemy going at about their half-speed in the teeth of the gale, which had shifted to W.N.W. It was not blowing so hard as it had been, but the sea was quite as high, and it was out of the question to work the guns to any purpose; so we kept on our course at about ten knots, until we saw the enemy well abaft the beam, then we slackened to eight knots. At times I took the con, but more often I was below on the main-deck seeing to our innumerable leaks. The plugs and plates were continually starting, especially the former, and it took no small labour to keep the main-deck at all dry.

At sunset the weather was as thick and the sea as high as ever, though the gale was still lessening, and accordingly we kept about the same relative positions *the enemy being to* port about 3,000 yards off, three [illegible] *abaft the* beam. The *Hornet* now went off to

discover what she could about the damages which they had sustained, and possibly to keep things lively on her own account, but the sea was too heavy to give her much chance of doing anything. Our remaining torpedo launch had been left with the prize (if indeed she had lived through the gale, which was more than doubtful), so she could be of no further use.

As soon as the night had fallen the enemy seemed to become apprehensive of our movements, for they were continually flashing round their search-lights. Occasionally they played on our ship, but not for long; clearly they were not looking for us. We had only one search-light left fit for service, but we now began playing it on the enemy, hoping, at least, to dazzle them and help the *Hornet* in this way. The mountainous seas continually obscured the rays, but still we could make out something of the enemy, and in this we were assisted to some extent by their own lights. For some time this went on, and then the *Hornet* in her turn brought her search-light to bear, and by its help we could make out more clearly not only the position of the enemy, but also the damage done to them. The *Charlemagne* was nearest to us, keeping carefully between us and the *Jauréguiberry*, and clearly intending to cover her as much as possible. This alone would have told us that the *Jauréguiberry* was badly damaged, even if we had not been able to see by the dancing gleams of the lights that two of her heavy guns—the forward gun and that in the starboard sponson—were dismounted, and the two forward turrets of her 14-cm. guns apparently destroyed altogether. Her forward bridge was wrecked, and the upper part of one funnel shot away, but both her masts were still standing, and as far as we could guess from her motion in the sea-way she was not at all water-logged. As I stood by the side of the skipper watchin

her, he remarked that she seemed all right between wind and water, and I could only say that for my part I had never hoped to hit her belt and had aimed at her turrets. 'Very well,' was the answer, 'she will give us so much less trouble to get her home.'

The *Charlemagne* had not lost any of her heavy guns, and seemed as light and handy as her consort; clearly she was going to be our real opponent. But she had by no means escaped from our fire; her midship bridges were wrecked, a large portion of her flying-deck aft had sunk down upon the spar-deck; there were open gaps along her midship battery where the 3-inch plating seemed to have been blown away bodily, and we could not make out a single 14-cm. gun fit for action. Besides this both her funnels were pierced in many places, and steam-pipes, wind-sails, and such like fittings seemed to be as much cut up as ours, which is saying a great deal.

It was weary work trying to make out these things by the eerie flashes of the dancing light. Search-lights are dazzling enough at all times, but when they are dancing wildly with the motion of the ships and constantly obscured by drifting spray or masked by heavy seas, they give a sort of blinking effect, which is most trying. All that I know is that I hope the French eyes ached as much as mine did before midnight. After that time it was better, because there was less sea and spray, and, besides, we had learnt as much we could, and there was consequently less need to observe carefully.

Towards morning the skipper made me lie down for a couple of hours, and when I woke it was already dawn. There was little or no wind and the swell had gone down considerably, but a fiery dawn, and at times the distinct 'sob' of the coming tempest, told us that *we had not seen* the last of the gale. The Captain *asked me if I thought* we could work the heavy guns in

OBSERVING BY SEARCH-LIGHTS

that sea, and on my saying that I thought we could very well, he replied, 'Well then, it is time to begin, for we shall not be very long without something worse than this. You may beat to quarters.'

The ship was already clear for action, and but a very few minutes passed before all were at quarters and the ship inspected. The enemy were now four points on our port beam in line ahead, the *Charlemagne* leading. Keeping so we could just train the forward guns to bear on her, but the skipper was not contented. As soon as full steam was reported, and before we two went to our places, he said that he did not mean another running fight. He meant to keep slightly across the enemy's bows, so as to rake him with all four guns at once. In this way he thought that we should bring the matter to a swift conclusion before the gale burst, which would not be very long. He was undoubtedly right there, for the western sky was already covered with a thick bank of purplish grey cloud, and there was that peculiar hush in the air which so often comes just before a heavy squall.

We went to our places, the skipper conning her from the after shield. In a minute or two she starboarded a point or so, and the word was given for the great guns to begin. There was no attempt to use the Maxims, for the enemy's upper works were practically crippled already, and the work in hand was to attack her turrets and armour. As the firing began the Captain's voice spoke through the telephone, 'Aim at her forward turret.' I ventured to suggest that I should try to fire rather lower and cut up her belts. 'No! no! no!' was the answer. 'I don't want to sink her. We can net the brace of them, and I mean to do it!' So we kept our sights on the turret as well as the motion of both ships would allow and fired slowly—not *more than three* shots per minute per gun—whenever

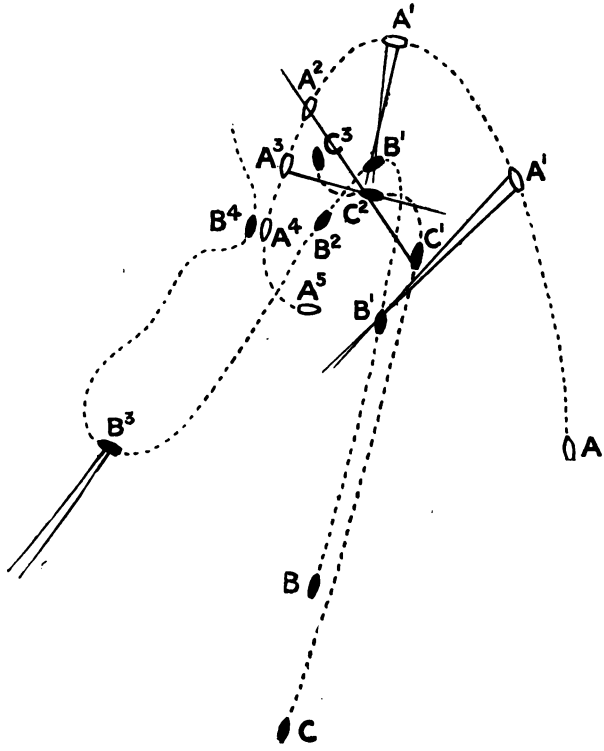
E 2

we could be tolerably sure of our aim. As soon as the fire began the enemy replied with all four guns, but their aim was not good. One of our masts was shot away below the top and went overboard, but that was all; and that single broadside was the only reply she made to us. Long before another could be fired we were so far across her bows that her after guns could not bear, and as for her forward guns, well, a lucky round of ours—that is to say, from my two guns—sent both shells just through the dome-shaped roof of the turret as she dipped on the swell. She kept straight on her course, apparently relying on her torpedoes, for we saw three or four flash along the water towards us, but we were just out of range. Two or three more shells struck the turret, and one, at least, its armoured base, and then, just as we had crossed her bows, the last rounds from my guns went home somewhere—we could not tell exactly where, but the flash and the smoke of the shells were visible through the top of the turret.

'Those guns are used up anyway, sir,' said the sub. by my side, and apparently the enemy thought so too, for the next minute we saw her bows fall off, and she was bearing away before the wind and sea. Doubtless she meant to bring her after turret into action again, but it looked exactly as if she was trying to escape, and a cheer went up from every man who saw it—a cheer that was taken up along fighting and platform decks—and I fancy that for the moment we all thought that the fight was over.

As soon as she fell off the *Centurion* came round too, just sending her some five or six shots, as we were broadside on, and then standing after her in pursuit. We were now on her starboard quarter, the *Jaurégui-berry, who had not* changed course with her flagship, *coming up hand* over hand on the other side of her,

and training over her port and after heavy guns to bear on us. 'Never mind her,' shouted the Captain, from the wreck of the forward bridge just astern of me, 'she's too far off; lay your guns on the flagship.'



A, *Centurion* commencing action; A¹, *Centurion* engaging *Charlemagne*; A², *Centurion* with engines disabled; A³, *Centurion* sinking *Jauréguiberry*; A⁴, *Centurion* alongside *Charlemagne*; A⁵, *Centurion* sinking; B, *Charlemagne* before action; B¹, B², *Charlemagne* during the fight; B³, *Charlemagne* sinking *Hornet*; B⁴, *Charlemagne* boarded; C, *Jauréguiberry* before action; C¹, *Jauréguiberry* disabling *Centurion*; C², *Jauréguiberry* attempting to ram; C³, *Jauréguiberry* sinking.

Apparently he had left the after shield in order to see the chase better, and now he came down and stood or

the cleats just behind me, ordering me to con ship through the telephone.

For a minute or two we kept on our new course; my sub. was just sighting on the flagship when we saw the flash and smoke of the guns of the *Jauréguiberry*. The Captain laughed. 'We'll attend to her in a—— 'gad, what's gone now?' There was a roar and crash somewhere below, and then the white steam came eddying up through hatches and gratings in stifling clouds; we felt the motion of the engines stop, and her head swung round to port. 'Meet her—meet her sharp; pass the word to know what's wrong.' I shouted the words along the telephone, and in a minute the answer came back, 'Shell in the port engines—two cylinders smashed and the slide gear gone.' The starboard engines now began to move again, and by putting her helm well over on the other side we could manage to keep her under control, but that was all.

To add to our perplexity the storm now burst over us. There was a dazzling lightning flash, and then a thick screen of rain hid the enemy from our eyes. We could see nothing but the angry seas close around us, flecked with the white manes of the sea mares, and rising and sharpening at the crests every moment. Then the gale came down on us nearly dead aft, driving down the stifling steam clouds until even we on deck found it difficult at times to know what we were doing. 'Lay your guns over to port,' said the Captain; 'we shall want them now; and pass the word to have the feed-gear supplied with cartridges. I will go aft and con her from there; you fire low as soon as you get your guns to bear, and if that craft touches us stand by to board.' With these words he left us and went aft.

The squall of rain passed over rapidly and showed *us the enemy: first, the Jauréguiberry* some eight cables *off on our port beam*, obviously heading up to ram, and

then the *Charlemagne* a long way ahead, but circling round to starboard as if intending to ram on that side if the other failed, and firing some machine guns at something which we could not see—probably the *Hornet*. We could not think of her; the other was drawing up at full speed. Every second we could see more clearly the red point of her ram lifting amid the foam round her bows as she rose on the swell. She was now but five cables off. We laid fair on that advancing ram and began to fire. Loud along our decks rang the cry, 'Ready away, boarders!' A torpedo or two from the enemy flashed away somewhere, or, at least, I was told so afterwards—at the moment I had neither eyes nor ears for anything but that sharp stem. Through the blinding rain and spray, through the incessant flame from the great muzzles in front of me, I watched it draw nearer and nearer, the white smother around her now flying before the gale, now leaping up in columns of spray and smoke from our bursting shell; would she touch us or not? Now she was within three cables; she lifted her forefoot clear out of the water as she rose on a giant billow, and as she lifted it I saw two shots strike just by the point of her ram. She dipped on the instant, and as quick as thought we were ready again waiting for her to rise on another wave, but now she faltered and swerved, and then she seemed to rise higher than before. Crash went our shells into that rising bow, and still it faltered and rose; then I saw what was happening, and asked leave through the telephone to cease firing on the sinking ship. Answer there was none but the howling of the wind and sea, and the shrill rattle-rattle of some machine guns in the foretops of the sinking foe. Now she swung round head to sea, and nearly broadside on, a short cable's length off, heeling heavily over towards us, and raising her bows high in the air. We could see her ere

crowding her shattered decks, and tumbling in heaps into her scuppers; and as we tossed on the seas we seemed to look right down into the black vortex closing round her. There was a roar as of bursting boilers; a murky torrent of water and ashes spouted up through her funnels, then the waves rolled over her in an angry swirl, and the great ship was gone.

We were rolling on the edge of that swirl in a way that threatened to have the guns off their sides. I was singing out to secure them with the electric brakes when a voice shouted, 'Look out, sir; she's right aboard us!' I turned at the word, and sure enough, through the driving scud, close on our starboard, loomed the huge shadow of the *Charlemagne*.

'Hard over; continue the firing,' was the word. Alas! it was easily said, but as for the ship she was like a log, and what a time it seemed before the guns came round. At last we got ours round, and all four swept her point blank almost at the same minute. She swerved and faltered; again the roar of the great guns and the crash and rattle of the bursting shell thundered out together. There was a shock and a hollow boom somewhere near our bows, and a great column of water spouted up, flooding everything forward. Again the great guns roared, there was another shock, this time astern, and another waterspout all speckled with splinters and pieces of plating; then somehow or other the two ships fell on board each other, broadside on.

In another minute every man that could move was on her decks. It was just one jump and rush and that was all, for every living thing on her seemed to have been slain or stunned by the terrible blast of our point-blank broadsides. For myself, I don't know how I got *out of the gun shield*, or exactly how things happened. I *remember* something of catching up a light line as I

THE LAST FIGHT

jumped aboard, and then seeing the boatswain make fast a hawser; but the first thing I can recollect distinctly is finding myself by her after-turret with the master-at-arms and two or three men, while a young officer in the uniform of a *capitaine de vaisseau* steadied himself against the turret and attempted to summon strength enough to give up his sword. I begged him to spare himself, and looked round for our own people.

The deck behind me was one confused mass of wreck and *débris*; here and there a maimed figure was trying to crawl into some shelter from the drenching wet, but otherwise hardly a man was to be seen. The two ships were fast to each other, thumping and grinding together at every roll, and swaying about in a fashion that might make both of them broach to at any moment. I tried to find some steering gear on board the prize; the only thing that I could discover was the stump of a binnacle and the supports from which a wheel had been blown away, while close by lay a mangled figure in the uniform of a rear-admiral of France. As I stumbled about among the wreck I came across our marine officer.

'Where are your fellows?' said I.

'Below, some of them; it's all right there—they've got the magazines, and they will soon clear the engines —you look to our craft.'

'Where's the skipper?'

'I don't know; isn't he here on deck?'

Without a word I took one flying jump back aboard the *Centurion*, and there, by the after barbette, I found him stretched out on his face on the deck stone-dead. Some of the engine-room people were coming on deck blackened and dripping from the water that was flooding the engine-rooms; they lifted the dead body and laid it out in some sort of shelter by the wrecked after-bridge.

Our decks were strewn with the bodies of our me

for as they mustered to board the *Jauréguiberry* they had been mown down like grass by the fatal fire of her machine guns. I looked below to see what state the ship was in, and a glance told me all. The bulkheads had been started fore and aft by the shock of those two torpedoes, and through the gratings of the fighting decks I could see the water dashing about and rising visibly every instant. The stokeholes must be already flooded and the fires drowned; happily the steam wastes were all open, so the boilers would not burst. I called the few hands left on board, and we managed to save the ship's log and papers and the paymaster's books, in spite of the water that dashed every minute along her main-deck through her shattered stern and bulkheads. Then, ordering all hands to save themselves on board the prize, I ran on deck and hauled down her ensign, bending on and hoisting instead her storm ensign, for at least the old ship should sink with colours flying. She now gave a heavy plunge and the sounds of the water within her told me that there was not a moment to spare: I gathered up the ensign, and, as she lifted, jumped back on board the prize; I suppose I had been away some seven or eight minutes. Then with one last look to see that no one was left on board I gave the word to cast her off. Instantly the two ships swung apart, and we saw her broach to and heel to starboard, with the running seas breaking heavily upon her ruined decks, sweeping away the wreckage and the corpses. She made a feeble attempt at recovery, then she settled down lower, and the grey veil of a driving squall hid from us the end of our dear old craft. When it passed, all that was left were some wreaths of steam flying away on the gale from an eddy in the tossing waves.

For a minute I stood looking at those flying wreaths *with our dead Captain's* words ringing in my ears:

'Not necessary yet—a decent burial.' Truly both he and they had found a worthy coffin and a fit funeral service. 'We can net the brace of them.' Truly we had done so, but not as he had hoped. And so they were gone: our noble old ship, whom we loved and trusted; our gallant chief, whom I for one believed in as I never shall others. And even while I stood looking after her some of our fellows hoisted her ensign over the tricolour, and there we kept it in spite of the gale that threatened to tear it to ribbons.

Well, I won't write any more to-night. It is some time past now, but the bitterness and the sorrow of it comes back as if it were an hour ago.

A nice state we were in on that wretched prize. As I said, all her upper works were completely wrecked. The only things apparently uninjured were the massive structures of her turrets, and her mainmast, which was still standing and carried the bunting. Her wheel-houses, conning-house, 'director tower,' and so forth, had either simply vanished into indescribable wreck, or else were standing, smashed and gutted. Her great flying-deck had fallen upon her spar-deck, and was creaking and swaying with the motion of the ship as if it would fetch away altogether.

The first thing to be done was to find some means of controlling her helm; clearly the steering gear on deck was past hope, so I went below, into a state of things which surpassed my wildest dreams. Not a gun was left serviceable between decks; nine-tenths of her crew had been blown into every shape into which 'high' explosives can twist and shatter human flesh and bone; her main and battery decks were smashed into great holes, even the beams being wrenched and twisted; her sides were in some places rent, in others *blown away* altogether; and though her belts seem

fairly whole, her protective deck was cut through in many places by the heads or splinters of shell. Through her torn sides the heavy seas were flooding her every moment, and great masses of water were finding their way into her hold. Amid this scene were huddled here and there some prisoners with our bluejackets and marines on guard over them; but guard and prisoners alike were chiefly occupied in keeping clear of the loose plates and beams which were continually shifting or going adrift altogether with the motion of the ship.

I made my way as well as I could towards her engine-rooms, which had by this time been occupied, and there found one of our assistant engineers and some of our engine-room staff making out the details of the strange machinery. They were just getting the steam pumps to work, and it was none too soon, for the water was already rising rapidly below the cranks, and if something were not done the seas would quickly swamp her. So I told the engineer to keep the pumps going, and then to keep her under way with what steam she could spare, so as to lessen as much as possible the risk of her broaching to. On my asking where her steering engines were I got no answer at first, but at that moment there came up my senior sub.—I cannot say how glad I was to find him still alive—and said that he had found duplicate steering engines, both in gear and both remaining motionless, as they had been set when the connections were shot away. He had already set about rigging fresh connections, and had come forward to see what materials he could get. This was good news at all events; so with a word of hearty thanks, and bidding him look sharp about it, I made my way forward towards her stokeholds. Here the fight was only just over; the French stokers and engineers had *barricaded themselves* with some vague notion of holding out as long as possible, and our people had blocked

the air-locks and inlets to stifle them out—a process which had had its effect by the time I got there. And now that they had surrendered many were too exhausted, and all were too sullen, to lift a hand to save themselves or us. Seeing the state of things I called for all our stokers who had boarded, and for A.B.'s to help, and thus got the after stokeholds manned, the assistant engineer and the chief stoker stationing the men, while I took stock of the coal left. It was not a cheering sight: the days of fight had nearly emptied her bunkers, and there was barely coal for twenty-four hours' steaming left,—not indeed enough for that if the steam pumps were to be kept going. So I ordered them to let out the fires in the fore stokeholds, and to keep the pumps and engines going with the others as best they could until the steering gear should be refitted. Then going on deck I mustered our people, and found that of all our ship's company five officers—that is to say, the marine officer, the sub-lieutenant, two middies and myself—and 112 engineer and warrant officers and men only were left alive, counting the men on guard and in the stokeholds. The three or four minutes when they were standing ready to board under the fire of crippled enemies had cost more lives many times over than all the long and hard fighting that had gone before it. The only thing that could be said was that the French crew had fared far worse—of them there was barely a sixth left, even if the engine-room staff and stokers were counted. Many of the survivors both French and English were wounded, and now that the excitement of the fight was over, and the reaction had come, all seemed so utterly worn out as hardly to care whether they lived or died. To let them remain like this would be fatal; so, learning from the marine officer that the cabins astern were fairly intact, I ordered an *ambulance* to be started in the ward-room, and all th

wounded, French and English alike, to be carried there. The French admiral we laid in the state-cabin aft, and the captain we carried to the driest state-room that there was, and got one of the ship's surgeons—the only one left alive—to attend upon him (poor fellow! he was perfectly unconscious, and so for the present, at least, he was spared the bitterness of his crushing defeat). This gave work to some of the men; the rest I called to help me in clearing the wreck. She was still moving ahead, and by jockeying the screws now and again we kept her from actually broaching to, but that was all. She pitched and rolled frightfully, and I began to think that she would either capsize or founder unless we lightened her in some way.

So first we set to work on the forward bridge and flying-deck, and by watching our opportunity as she lurched we contrived to start a good deal of the wreck overboard. Above all, we got rid of the ruins of the great foremast and the upper part of the forward funnel. Up to this point the French prisoners worked fairly well with us, but when it came to throwing guns overboard they refused to stir a hand and became openly insubordinate. Well, if they did not work they should not be a nuisance, so we drove them down below and posted three files under the master-at-arms, with orders to fire at once on the least attempt at mutiny. Then we set to work, and one by one we got overboard most of the 14-cm. guns and some of the smashed beams and plates that cumbered the battery-deck.

By this time some temporary connections were rigged to the steering engines, and a wheel fitted on the solid base of the after turret just forward of the turret itself. The sub-lieutenant took the helm, and the ship *was once more* under control, and, besides, she was *perceptibly relieved* by the lightening of her top-hamper.

But notwithstanding this our prospects were very bad. Night was falling and it was blowing harder than ever, with a fearful sea. Every minute she took in green seas, which went thundering through her ruined decks. The steam-pumps worked their best, but the water was steadily rising in the hold, and it was becoming clear that at this rate she could not live much longer. Hitherto we had kept a bright look-out for the *Hornet*, keeping the ensigns flying that she might know the state of affairs when she sighted us, but not a trace of her had been seen, and now it leaked out from some of the prisoners that they had seen her sink under the fire of their machine guns just before they fell aboard us. This was pleasant news, for in my own mind I had hoped that she would have taken us off this wretched prize, or at least brought us some help before we foundered. Now that hope was vain.

I went round the cabins astern ostensibly to visit the ambulance, but really to see whether the stern was sound enough to stand being pooped if I put her before the sea. On my way, partly from motives of civility, partly to conceal my real business, I paid a visit to the French officers, of whom every single survivor was in the ambulance badly wounded. If it had not been so, we should have had less trouble in dealing with their men. The captain I found conscious, but very weak, and therefore I excused myself from talking much. His own servant was dead, and so I called for a man to attend upon him, and it did not tend to raise my opinion of our prisoners that they seemed to think it our business to nurse their wounded chief. However, anything was better than unwilling service in such a matter, and so, making allowance for the demoralisation of exhaustion and defeat, I told off one of our own bluejackets for the duty. In the ward-room I found the same sort of thing. The French

surgeon complained that his own people refused to obey him, and I sent a boatswain's mate and six men to help our own surviving ward-room servants, who were already at work. The whole stern seemed fairly dry, and, at all events, much more capable of keeping out the seas than her shattered bows. So returning to the spar-deck I first lowered the bunting—there was no use in keeping that aloft any longer—and then, watching my opportunity, I put her helm up. She answered pretty well, but as she came round something 'took charge' forward with a force that threatened to capsize her. Then she got fairly before the sea and the worst was over. We were pooped every minute, as I had expected, but the deadlights were shipped everywhere astern, and the after turret prevented the weight of the seas from going forward, and thus she took much less into her hold than previously. We soon found that the pumps were able to keep the water under, and then leaving a midshipman to con ship in place of the sub., who was exhausted, I went forward to see what had 'taken charge' as we went about.

On getting to her bows I found the two great guns in the fore turret trailing about with their muzzles on her deck, one looking a good deal longer than the other, and obviously, therefore, loose from its slide. Getting some men forward we took a turn with a hawser round both guns and moored them in this fashion, doing our best to wedge the dismounted gun so that she should not slip forward. Then we got into the turret through its ripped roof to see what was the matter with the mountings, but that was all we could do. Inside, ladders, fittings, and everything else appeared a perfect chaos; we could make out that more than one of our shells had pierced the base of the turret, and that it *was almost fatal* to explore the wreck while the ship *was plunging* in that sea; so, trusting to our moorings

to hold the guns, we got out of the turret and went aft.

All night long I was on the alert, for I had not the least notion where we were. We had now been forty-eight hours without any observations, and our dead reckoning was completely upset by the manœuvring of the fight. Every compass on board was shot away, and all that we had to steer by was the pocket-compass which you gave me—we never thought then that it would do such service. By its aid we knew that we were scudding nearly E. by S. ½ E. before a terrible gale, which would take us somewhere near the Gut of Gibraltar, but whether into the Gut or on shore we could not tell in the least. All that I could do was to keep a bright look-out for breakers ahead, and hope for the best.

In the morning there came fresh cause for anxiety. The assistant engineer reported that he had no coal left to keep way on her and the pumps going, and unless he could do both it was clear that our moments were numbered. We set to work and passed down everything that would burn that we could find, and with this sorry shift we kept steam up in a fashion until the evening, the weather continuing as bad as ever.

I was standing conning ship by our improvised wheel with the marine officer by my side, looking out at the fast falling night. Neither of us spoke, but I fancy our thoughts were pretty much to the same effect, that whether we lived or died the sooner the thing was over the better, when there was a sudden hail of 'Sail ho!' Far ahead we could see two indistinct blotches on the swiftly narrowing offing; we could make out their lights with some difficulty, but without showing lights or signal of some kind ourselves we *could not hope* that they would see us. Guns be

been thrown overboard or were useless; search-lights we had no current for: all that we could do was to show flares from the fighting tops of the mainmast, and I remember now that I laughed grimly at the notion of the proud flagship reduced to showing flares like a Yarmouth smack. After a time our flares were seen, and the new-comers bore down and proved to be H.M. ships *Crescent* and *Brilliant*, sent by the Admiral to obtain news of the enemy's squadron. The *Crescent* immediately sent us hawsers and took us in tow, going dead slow, and then, notwithstanding the seas, the boats of both ships began to take off the people on board. First we sent off the prisoners, then the wounded, then all that we could spare of our own people, and fortunately got only one boat stove in doing it. Then the Captain of the *Crescent* came on board, and looking at the water-logged wreck suggested to me to abandon her. I could not do it; she seemed to me the only relic of our lost *Centurion*, and I begged to be permitted to save her if I could. He said that he would do his best—he thought that in six hours he could tow us to Gibraltar, if I could so long keep her afloat. I was willing to try, and the sub-lieutenant and engineer and some thirty hands volunteered to stay with me and share the risk and toil. Then the Captain went off on board his own ship and put her to her best speed, while we did our best to keep the pumps going. It was terrible work, for we had only one stokehold manned, and there the men were more than knee-deep in water, and were feeding the furnaces with scraps of planking or anything else that could be found. For myself, I was at the helm all the time, and it seemed a lifetime before I saw dimly some lights around us, and felt our sinking craft touch ground in the Bay.

In a very few minutes man-o'-war boats were alongside, *but they* were not the Crescent's. We did not

stop to think; just as we were, dripping, dirty, exhausted, we tumbled into them and were pulled aboard a stately ship. I remember being helped up her ladder, and finding a crowd assembled at the gangway to cheer us. I remember, too, that somehow the cheer died away and we were received in dead silence. And the next thing I knew was that I was in bed in a comfortable state-room, with C—— and a staff surgeon standing by my bedside.

I recollect C—— telling me that the *Latouche Tréville* was all right, and the doctor saying that he would not have any talking, and that the only things he would suffer me to do that day were eating and sleeping, and then I have a hazy notion that I took him at his word.

This letter must go now if the *Crescent* is to take it to England. Farewell! You shall hear very soon the little there is left to tell.

LETTER VII

Portsmouth.

You have seen our safe arrival in the papers, and you have doubtless also seen the 'Gazette.' It is all very satisfactory, only I hope C—— won't grudge me my post rank and C.B. I am very glad of the way they have treated my sub.; he is a very smart, steady fellow, and I hope to have him under me again. Everyone else deserves his promotion; it is a capital thing that they have found a comfortable berth on shore for the master-at-arms; it will be doubly welcome to him, as I know that he is engaged to be married. The engineer is well provided for, but he deserves it all and more.

To go on where I left off. The next morning (or at least I suppose it was so) after that first awakening *I found* myself, as I thought, quite strong enough

to be about, so I turned out and hunted for some clothes, but could not find any; it was clear that my friend the doctor did not mean me to go about without his leave, so I turned in again. In a short time came the ward-room steward with some breakfast, and I asked him to get me my things. He said yes, he would, but rather dubiously, and disappeared promptly. Then I went on with my breakfast lazily, until I was interrupted by a tap at the door, and the doctor appeared, and with him another officer in a vice-admiral's buttons and stripes. I had never before seen him, but by photographs and descriptions I recognised at once the Mediterranean commander-in-chief. He greeted me warmly, saying that he had called early, but could only take the very first opportunity of visiting the chief survivor of so great a success. Then he asked the doctor if I was fit for talking, and having got a satisfactory answer, he sat down and heard the whole story from me. Only he would not hear one word of regret for the *Centurion*. Had she not sunk in her duty, and what better fate could befall her?

When I had finished, he put a great many questions, chiefly about the working of the automatic guns and their effect. I told him all that I knew of the working, and what I had seen of the effect on board the *Charlemagne*: and then, after some little reflection, he said that the new weapons seemed to have had a crucial test and stood it well; they would change the whole conditions of maritime war—of that there was no doubt. Then he left me, asking for a written report as soon as I could finish it.

Soon afterwards the doctor returned and got me fitted out in borrowed clothes—for you know that I had lost everything but the things which I stood up in, and those were utterly spoilt by dirt and wet—and introduced me to the ward-room of the Royal Oak,

where I got a most cordial welcome. Then I went forward with the first lieutenant to see the people who had stuck to me during those last hours. The sub-lieutenant and engineer were still in the doctor's hands, but both seemed as comfortable as they could be, and long and hearty were our greetings. The A.B.'s had been formed into messes by themselves by the chief's special order until the *Centurion* could be once more afloat—on paper; and again I was welcomed in a way that made me feel very much ashamed of deserving it so little.

On the first opportunity I paid a visit to the French captain, whom I found badly wounded, but able to receive visits and apparently glad to see me. He was good enough to think himself indebted to me for attentions on board the prize, and we were soon on the best of terms. He said that on passing Gibraltar they had no notion that there was a battleship in port, and that on that first night the *Latouche Tréville* was merely on the look-out for torpedo craft. The terrible fire that disabled her was the first warning to them that a serious encounter was at hand, and even then they did not realise the weapons with which they had to do. Confident in their own power and speed, they gave chase the next morning, expecting only a short stern chase and an easy conquest; and the first thing which undeceived them was that brief fight in which we lost our conning-house. It seemed that the two ships (the *Jauréguiberry* and the *Charlemagne*) were about eight cables apart, ranging up on either quarter of the *Centurion*, when she suddenly threw herself across the bows of the former and crippled her in less time than it takes to write it. On board the *Charlemagne* it seemed perfectly incomprehensible, and accordingly she stood after us, not without hope and in her turn she was perfectly demoralised in

couple of minutes or so. The damage on board her in that first fight was awful—her midship battery was completely disabled, chiefly by the loss among the crews, and the nerves of the survivors were so utterly shaken that the captain and officers, and even the admiral himself, could not prevail on them to work the secondary armament again. But it was, after all, not so much the actual damage done as the appalling volume of our fire that impressed them. That evening the French admiral had issued an order pointing out that they were clearly confronted with unknown weapons of tremendous power, and that, if attacked again, their only adequate means of defence was the ram, and, therefore, that both ships must endeavour to ram in concert at all hazards.

In the last fight he told me that our fire was nearly as disastrous in its effects as it had been before. Their secondary armament was useless; but the crews of their heavy guns were working in some sort of security, which was rudely disturbed by the ruin of their forward turret. He was standing by the admiral when the *Jauréguiberry* sank, and he said that they looked at each other without a word. The admiral had been killed by a shell just before they fell aboard us; the point-blank fire of our guns had completely swept the *Charlemagne* above the belt; she was absolutely out of control, and it was almost by accident that we had been torpedoed or the ships had fallen aboard each other as they did; himself, he had expected nothing better for the *Charlemagne* than the fate of the *Jauréguiberry*, and he did not know how she had escaped it.

There were two officers from the *Tréhouart* among the wounded, and their account was even stronger. *Left to attend* the damaged Latouche Tréville, they *were too far* distant to know what had befallen the

first division, and they advanced to meet us, expecting, no doubt, a serious contest, but not what they really found. Our first fire, before the ships changed courses, had wrecked her fore turret, and the uptakes of both funnels, besides clearing her upper deck of every living thing. Then when she had starboarded, and was rolling in the trough of the sea, she was hit in less than forty seconds by five 12-inch shells, two of which burst among her engines, and two certainly, if not all the three others, had gone right through her, and burst in her double bottom. One and all agreed that, but for the accident which disabled half our engine power, we should have taken or sunk every one of their ships without any serious damage or difficulty. And the general view seemed to be that our Captain made a serious mistake in not running amuck that first night after disabling the *Latouche Tréville*, when he could readily have come to close quarters in the fog, and would have found them quite unprepared to encounter a battleship.

The officers of the *Latouche Tréville* all complained that their admiral and the captains of the battleships ought to have paid more attention to the first fight with their ship than they really did. They had counted the flashes of twelve shots from our heavy guns in twenty-five seconds; and those shots left them with five out of their eight turrets wrecked, their starboard engines disabled, their upper works cut to pieces, and three great leaks in the belt. And yet the officers of the battleships persisted in putting all this down to quick-firing guns; they knew the Elswick 8-inch quick-firing guns, and made up their minds that the enemy must be a cruiser heavily armed with weapons of that type. Disabled as they were, the slaughter caused by our Maxim broadside in the *second* encounter was terrible, and as soon as the

saw that the *Charlemagne* could not relieve them, they had nothing to do but to strike, and save further bloodshed.

There were two things which impressed me greatly in these conversations: the first was that, however dearly our victory had been won, and however bitterly we might feel the loss of our noble craft and our gallant shipmates, still there is a fearful difference between a battle won and a battle lost; the other was the only gleam of fun in the whole story. You may remember that on board the prize we had to tell off some of our own people to attend the ambulance. It seemed that the French surgeon was terribly at a loss for broth, or at all events something hot for the wounded. The galleys were destroyed, and the Frenchmen, sullen and crushed by weariness and defeat, would not lift a hand, so our people set to work to try what they could do, and it was equally amusing to see the surprise of the French officers at the fact of an Englishman cooking anything, especially amid such surroundings, and the struggle between politeness and veracity in describing the result.

The *Charlemagne* was perfectly sound up to her protective deck, and was pumped dry and got into dock without much trouble. Then they repaired her sufficiently to stand the voyage to England, and so we brought home both our prizes.

And now you have the whole story of our short but eventful commission. For me it has been unmixed good fortune, but I know that I would gladly give rank and decoration, and all the rest of it, a dozen times over to get our noble old *Centurion* back from her quiet berth in the deep Atlantic.

APPENDIX

(*See pp.* 10, 12.)

This account of the refitting of the *Centurion* is submitted with much diffidence, especially as it has been written without any knowledge of the present distribution of weights in her design. Roughly speaking, the idea is that the weight of the 8-inch belt would be equal to that of the present belts, and the weight of the turtle-back to that of the present protective deck; that the removal of the casemates, shields, and military masts would save the weight required for the Maxims and the extra ammunition; and that in rebuilding the barbette towers weight might be economised which would counterbalance the increased weight of the heavy guns.

This last point clearly depends on the design for the automatic gear; and the present work, though not meant as a treatise on the subject, would be incomplete without some indication of what is intended.

The first, if not the main, point in the design is that it purports to effect a considerable saving in the weight and cost of the springs. It is well known that quick-firing guns are now mounted on slides, and the force of their recoil is taken on springs, which immediately send the gun back to the firing point on the slide, no matter what may be its elevation; it may not be so generally known that the present idea of the Government and the manufacturers is to mount the 12-inch 46-ton gun in the same way. Now, as an angle of 35° of muzzle elevation is required, and the springs are relied on to hold the gun at the firing-point on the slide when at that elevation, it is clear that springs of enormous initial compression—that is to say, of enormous and, in fact, *prohibitive* weight and cost—are required.

It is proposed to avoid this difficulty in the follow

manner. The gun will be mounted on a slide and held at the firing point by an electric brake, so that whatever the elevation its weight does not rest on the springs. On firing the current is reduced in the electric brake, and the recoil is taken on the springs, with such assistance from the brake as may be required. Then the gun is urged forward on its return by one set of springs, while another set are held back; this motion past, the second set of springs produces a stroke. This stroke at its commencement, while the springs are still at their ultimate power, or nearly so, works an elevating ram, which by means of an automatic adjusting gear gives the varying stroke required to bring the slide from any firing elevation to one rather above the horizontal bearing, at the same time throwing out of gear a corresponding elevator which has given the firing elevation. The gun then completes its return, travelling down an inclined plane, and when it reaches the firing-point on the slide is again held by the electric brake. Then, when required, the second set of springs are released, the first-mentioned elevator is thrown out of gear, and the second into gear again, and the slide and gun go to the firing elevation.

The two elevators correspond exactly, and the limit of the stroke given by each depends on the adjustment of its automatic gear. In each case—though it is only important with reference to the firing elevation—this adjustment may proceed whether the elevator is in gear or not, but it only takes effect on the gun if and when the elevator is in gear. Thus the officer in charge proceeds with his sighting without reference to the motions of the gun, which will be affected at the proper time, and not before, by what he does.

In this manner it is proposed to avoid springs of high initial compression, and at the same time to keep the sighting as continuous as it is with a 4·7-inch gun and its shoulderpiece. And here, if desired, the design may stop: if it be desired to have manual loading within the barbette, the elevators may easily be adapted to it without any sacrifice of principle; if it be desired to combine it with any *particular form of* breach-gear, the part of the stroke left *unused is available* to work it.